

Learner Perceptions of Good Teacher Attributes: Japan and Other Asian Contexts

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Abstract

Teacher quality is an integral component of a learner's educational experience and development. Positive teacher influences can contribute to learner knowledge, skill acquisition, and a positive learning environment (Jahangiri & Mucciolo, 2016). An absence of contemporary research into Japanese learner perceptions of positive teacher attributes was the catalyst of the present study. An initial pilot study conducted by the researchers revealed that in education levels ranging from elementary school to university, high school teachers and private instructors/tutors were the most selected categories, with English being the most common subject. Learners most notably perceived good teachers to be friendly, knowledgeable, empathetic, and humorous. Learner perceptions also revealed that respect for the teacher/student relationship dynamic and a teacher's sternness were important underlying themes. The current study provides a year-long cross-sectional analysis of over 157 Japanese undergraduate students' perceptions of good teacher attributes using a mixed methods design. The researchers will discuss the attributes selected by the learners and the contexts in which these individuals formed favorable perceptions as evidenced through their reflective written narratives. Additionally, the variable of gender is introduced and examined in the current research. The findings are then compared against other contemporary Asian-based studies (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, Al-Siyabi, & Al-Maamari, 2015; Nghia, 2015; Wichadee, 2010) relevant to this field.

Keywords: Asian learners, Japanese learners, Positive teacher attributes

Introduction

This study explored the perceptions of good teacher attributes. Many students will have undergone an 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975) by the time they complete high school due to their large amount of direct contact with teachers, placing them in a position to identify good and bad teacher qualities. In a traditional classroom, there is often an emphasis on the transmission of factual knowledge and students are offered few opportunities to identify their own learning needs or reflect collectively on their learning experience (Azer, 2005). Barnes and Lock (2013) advocated for the implementation of in-depth and focused investigations into learner perceptions of effective teachers to be carried out in various settings so that teachers can develop greater understandings that will help them to deal with the challenges of instructing students of different attitudes. Support for recognition of the value of student beliefs on good teaching characteristics was posited by Bullock (2015) who noted that students see teachers daily and are able to comment on teaching in both good (and adverse) situations. Coppedge and Shreck (1988) noted the importance of personality characteristics and their relation to teaching effectiveness and suggested that knowledge of subject matter, teaching methods or materials are all givens in the students' minds and what really matters to students are the teacher's human qualities. This paper reported on the implementation of influential variables that can influence learner perceptions of good teaching (Zhang & Watkins, 2007) in the current study. Findings on teacher attributes from several other Asian-based studies (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, Al-Siyabi, & Al-Maamari, 2015; Nghia, 2015, Wichadee, 2010). were compared with findings from the current research due to a lack of recent Japan-based studies in this field.

Literature Review

Several previous Japan-based studies that have been conducted on the issue of 'good teacher' attributes, albeit in the distant past. Two of these Japan-based studies provided positive teacher attributes that were added to the current study's teacher attributes checklist, (see Appendix A), that is, *kind, friendly, enthusiastic, and humorous* (Hadley & Hadley, 1996); and *good at communication* (Makarova & Ryan, 1997). Hadley and Hadley found that several good teacher attributes selected by students, i.e., *knowledgeable, experienced, humble, can be admired, trusted and depended on* - formed a depiction of the culturally specific relationship in Japan of *sempai* (senior) - *kohai* (junior) commonly found in companies, organizations, and institutions. References to the sempai-kohai relationship by participants in the current research were explored in the findings and discussion sections of this paper. The particular variables included in these Japan-based studies were more limited than those included in the current research. For example, a specific focus on; participant-gender (Shimizu, 1995), school subject. i.e., English (Shimizu, 1995) and teacher type, i.e., foreign language teacher (Makarova & Ryan, 1997). The current study explored positive teacher attributes through the eyes of the learner and with the inclusion of several variables that can influence the practice of good teachers (Zhang & Watkins, 2007); namely, learner and teacher gender, subject, and education level in order to broaden the breadth of possibilities from which students could select their 'good teacher'.

The current study was Japan-based and involved a comparative exploration of three Asian-based studies conducted on learner perceptions of personal characteristics of a ‘good teacher’ for the purpose of broadening the researchers’ understanding of teacher attribute-based research in the Asia. Three studies were selected for their recent publication and relatively large number of students as participants.

Firstly, an Omani quantitative study (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015) of the characteristics of good English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers which involved 171 high school students (and 233 English teachers). Al-Mahrooqi et al. found that Omani students value the nature of the relationship with their teachers equally to actual classroom practice and the teacher’s ability to build good rapport and a strong relationship with their students while also making their English lessons interesting. The affective variables rated most highly students in this study were (for teachers to be): fair and just, enthusiastic, friendly, loving, and creative. This study differed from the current study in that no qualitative approach was employed, the students were in high school rather than being undergraduates, and participants’ gender was not included.

Secondly, a Vietnamese mixed methods study (Nghia, 2015) of the qualities of English teachers for enhanced learning which included 339 adults studying at Commercial English Language Centers (CLCs). In the qualitative stage, the most highly rated professional attributes were (for teachers) to be punctual, prepared for lessons, and behave professionally. The most favorable personal attributes identified by students were for teachers to be dedicated, friendly, helpful, and understanding (in the sense of being compassionate). In the quantitative stage, there were no statistically significant differences found among the perceptions of the importance of teacher qualities for enhancing their learning between male and female students. Date suggested that students wanted to study with teachers of agreeable personalities, not only in the classroom but also after class.

Thirdly, a Thai quantitative study (Wichadee, 2010) of the characteristics of effective English teachers which included 400 undergraduates enrolled in English courses (and 53 English teachers). Participants stressed the importance of teachers preparing lessons well and being good communicators, being interested in students, helping to alleviate students’ anxiety in class, good listeners, approachable and friendly, patient, humorous, and fair. Wichadee found that between the two gender-based groups, i.e., the 139 males and the 261 female students there were no statistically significant differences in their selection of socio-affective skills that students perceived as being important for effective English teachers.

Inclusion of these studies helped to broaden the scope of the current researchers’ understanding of learner perceptions in the absence of contemporary Japan-based studies on this research issue. A comparative analysis of the current study and these three other studies is presented in the discussion section.

Methodology

The current study considered learner perceptions by developing an understanding of meanings from learners’ actions, the experiences and histories that they have had, and

how they are understood in the context of these interactions (Wray, 2007). With this interpretive paradigm in mind, a mixed methods approach was implemented, i.e., a student questionnaire, a teacher attributes checklist, and a reflective blog activity, titled *Student Consent Form*, includes the student questionnaire and blog activity, see Appendix B, and the teacher attributes checklist, see Appendix A. These documents were translated into written Japanese for the participants' comprehension. The employment of a mixed methods-based approach in the current study aimed to strengthen the persuasive and rigorous collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) of both qualitative and quantitative data. The current study included two stages: *Stage One*, a small scale cross-sectional study; and *Stage Two*, a larger scale cross-sectional study which included the addition of teacher gender as a variable and 'sternness' as a teacher attribute on the teacher attribute checklist, see Appendix A.

Research Aims

In this second stage of the study, the researchers addressed the following questions:

What are the teacher attributes most commonly selected by the learners? (Stages 1 & 2)

What are the education levels and subjects taught by the teachers? (Stages 1 & 2)

What potential relationships exist between:

- a) learner gender and teacher attributes selected? (Stages 1 & 2)
- b) the education level taught by teachers and their gender? (Stage 2 only)
- c) possible themes derived from learners' written reflections? (Stages 1 & 2)
- d) outcomes of the current study and other Asian-based research? (Stages 1 & 2)

Student Questionnaire & Teacher Attributes Checklist

Learner perceptions were initially identified by a questionnaire requiring participants to identify the profile of their good teacher by including the education level, subject, and teacher's gender (*added for Stage Two only*); and complete a consent agreement to participate in this research, see Appendix B. Neither participation nor nonparticipation in the research had any bearing on the grading of participants in this course. Participants were informed orally by the researchers that they could withdraw from the research at any stage. Also, participants were requested to select their top five teacher attributes that a good teacher from a list of attributes (*24 attributes for Stage One & 25 attributes for Stage Two, with 'sternness' added*) which included spaces and could add different attributes if they wanted to do so in the boxes titled *other*, see Appendix A. Many of the teacher attributes used for the checklist were adopted from several studies (Azer, 2005; Barnes & Lock, 2013; Bullock, 2015; Coombe, 2013) and those noted in italics in Appendix A were developed by the current researchers. The checklist was translated into Japanese and authenticated by several Japanese first language users (non-participants) to minimize the possibility that participants would understand the attributes through multiple meanings.

Reflective Blog Activity

Upon their completion of the student questionnaire and the teacher attributes checklist participants were requested by the researchers to write a blog reflection explaining why that teacher was good and include a description of their experiences with that teacher through their individual interpretations. Students could not see each other's

blogs online. Each participant was given several weeks to complete their writing, see Appendix B. The blogs were to be written in English because the participants were studying in an English course. During the process of completing the blog activity each researcher was able to monitor the participants' blogs in his class group to ensure that the writing was comprehensible. One-on-one interactions took place sometimes between the researchers and participants to clarify written meanings. Upon completion of the blogs participants were given an opportunity to engage in small class group discussions by summarizing any or all of the details of their blog writings in spoken English primarily. These discussions provided the experience of communicating perceptions with others and for the researchers to observe these interpretive experiences that learners shared.

Data were collected via non-random sampling to allow for all blog posts to be analyzed with the aim of delving deeply into the details of experience related to the five highest rated attributes identified in aggregate from the sample pool. The five highest rated attributes provided the themes for analysis. The education levels and subjects were totaled to find which levels of education and which subjects specifically were important in the participants' selection of a good teacher. The blogs were analyzed by the researchers for contextualized interpretations of the reasons behind the learners selecting the variables of education level, subject, and positive teacher attributes.

Participants

In Stage One there were 35 participants, i.e. 22 females and 13 males, who were second year undergraduate students derived from two class groups. In Stage Two there were 122 participants, i.e., 67 males and 55 females, who were a mix of first and second year undergraduates derived from seven class groups. The participants were identified by the researchers as having a comprehensive learning experiences in Japanese educational settings.

Results & Findings

Teacher Attributes Checklist and Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire provided data for the education level, the subject taught, the gender of the teacher (Stage Two only), and the teacher attributes. The results of the data collected appear below.

Teacher Attributes Across All Education Levels. As "Sternness" was added to the teacher attribute checklist in Stage Two, its presence could have influenced the participants' choices regarding the other attributes. Hence, the authors have refrained from combining the totals from Stage One and Stage Two.

In Stage One, the five most common teacher attributes were Friendly (23), Knowledgeable (18), Empathetic (15), Enthusiastic about teaching (15), and Humorous (14) (see Table 1). For a full description of all the attributes, see Appendix C.

Table 1
Top 5 teacher attributes by participant gender in Stage One

Attribute	Male (n=13)	Male %	Female (n=22)	Female %	Total (n=35)	Total %
Friendly	11	85%	12	55%	23	66%
Knowledgeable	6	46%	12	55%	18	51%
Empathetic	4	31%	11	50%	15	43%
Enthusiastic about teaching	7	53%	8	36%	15	43%
Humorous	5	38%	9	41%	14	40%

Taking the gender of participants into consideration, there was agreement, despite differences in rankings, with the five most popularly selected attributes across both genders (see Appendix C).

In Stage Two of the study, the top five attributes were Friendly (63), Enthusiastic about teaching (61), Empathetic (59), Kind (43), and Knowledgeable (40) (see Table 2). For a full description of all the attributes, see Appendix D.

Table 2
Top 5 teacher attributes by participant gender in Stage Two

Attribute	Male (n=67)	Male %	Female (n=55)	Female %	Total (n=122)	Total %
Friendly	31	46%	32	58%	63	52%
Enthusiastic about teaching	33	49%	28	51%	61	50%
Empathetic	27	40%	32	58%	59	48%
Kind	27	40%	16	29%	43	35%
Knowledgeable	28	42%	12	22%	40	33%

An analysis by gender revealed general agreement in the top five teacher attributes across both genders, despite some variance in their rankings. The attributes “Compassionate” (22) and “Caring” (18), which appeared in the top five attributes selected by female participants but were absent in the top five selected by male participants, were the only exceptions (see Appendix D).

Teacher Attributes Based on Education Level. As mentioned, several education levels were identified. Based on Stage Two data, Table 3 provides an analysis of the most common teacher attributes in the context of the three main education levels observed: Other (17), Junior high school (28), and High school (63).

Table 3

Stage Two results of the top five teacher attributes according to education level

Other (n=17)		Junior High School (n=28)		High School (n=63)	
Attribute	Total	Attribute	Total	Attribute	Total
Friendly	10	Enthusiastic about teaching	16	Friendly	36
Enthusiastic about teaching	9	Compassionate	9	Empathetic	35
Empathetic	8	Empathetic	9	Enthusiastic about teaching	28
Kind	7	Friendly	9	Knowledgeable	28
Humorous	7	Kind	9	Kind	24

Although appearing in different frequency, the results revealed that the majority of the most common teacher attributes were present across the three education levels. The attributes “Humorous”, “Compassionate”, and “Knowledgeable” were the only exceptions, each appearing in only one education level respectively.

Other teacher attributes. Participants could contribute attributes in the “Other” section of the checklist. Table 4 lists the attributes that were provided by participants in Stage One and Stage Two.

Table 4

“Other” teacher attributes provided by participants in Stage One & Stage Two

Stage	Other Teacher Attributes		
Stage 1	Consideration	Easy to talk with	A good speaker
	Respect	Severe	Sing English songs
Stage 2	Always smile	Decent	Expressive
	Fashionable	Funny	Good speaker
	Passed	Serious	Teaching right thing
	Teaching well	Thoughtfulness	

Education Level and Subject. Combining the data for education levels and subjects from Stage One and Stage Two of the study revealed that High school (77) appeared most frequently, followed by Junior high school (35), Other (29), Elementary school (11), and University (5). Although there was a much variance in subjects identified, the top three subjects across all the education levels were English (36), Math (36), and Physical education (P.E.) (16). For a full description of all education levels and subjects, see Appendix E.

Teacher Gender. Strong agreement among participants of both genders was found regarding teacher gender in Stage Two. The results indicated that 76% of the teachers were male while 24% were female (see Table 5).

Table 5

Relationship between participant gender and teacher gender in Stage Two

		Participant Gender				
Teacher Gender	Male (n=67)		Female (n=55)		Total (n=122)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	57	85%	36	65%	93	76%
Female	10	15%	19	35%	29	24%

A predominance of male teachers in the data was also evidenced across the three most common education levels identified (see Table 6). Specifically, the highest proportion of male teacher occurred in Junior High School (84%), High School (79%), and Other (72%). Conversely, female teachers appeared most frequently in “Other” (28%) education levels, followed by “High School” (21%) and “Junior High School” (16%).

Table 6

Relationship between teacher gender and most commonly selected education levels in Stage Two

Teacher Gender	Education Level					
	Other (n=18)		Junior High School (n=25)		High School (n=62)	
N	%	N	%	N	%	
Male	13	72%	21	84%	49	79%
Female	5	28%	4	16%	13	21%

Written Blog Reflections

The written reflections provided context to the attributes that were selected. In this section, a non-random sampling of excerpts from students’ reflections is provided to gain a better understanding of their intended meaning.

Friendly. Typically, “Friendly” referred to instances where teachers made time to converse on various topics with their students, and often, outside of class. Reflection 1 demonstrates this theme:

Reflection 1

He was friendly. He might come to play to us in break time and talked. He has a detailed talk about a movie and an entertainer and news as well as knowledge of the math. (Stage 2: Participant No. 51, Female)

Enthusiastic About Teaching. A teacher’s enthusiasm for teaching was perceived in various ways. Despite the positive nature of the word “Enthusiastic” in general, in some reflections, it appeared to convey negative behavior by the teacher (see Reflection 2). In many cases, however, participants linked such behavior to positive outcomes.

Reflection 2

I think she is very enthusiastic about teaching too. Her class time is very dark time. Especially when the Choir Festival because she teach me piano accompaniment very hard. So came the piano accompaniment prize. (Stage 2:

Participant No. 27, Male)

Empathetic. Teachers in this category were often described by participants as being good listeners and providing advice to students. Reflection 3 demonstrates this tendency.

Reflection 3

I sometimes could not speak but he is empathetic good listener, I was able to think calmly. (*Stage 1: Participant No. 16, Female*)

Kind. In numerous instances, teachers who (in the eyes of the participants) took extra steps to help or advise students were perceived as kind (see Reflection 4).

Reflection 4

She was a so kind woman. She gave some test for me. It's her original test. (*Stage 2: Participant: No. 13, Female*)

Knowledgeable. Teachers who were credited as being knowledgeable were acknowledged, not only for their knowledge of the subjects taught, but also for their general knowledge. Reflection 5 is such an example.

Reflection 5

[...] he is the person who has the most knowledgeable. He has to not only English knowledge but life knowledge. So he taught me many things. For example love, study, life style, family, school life [...]. (*Stage 1: Participant No. 6, Female*)

Emergent Attribute

In Stage One of this study, one of the participants added “severe” as an attribute in the “Other” section of the teacher attributes checklist. Reflection 6 is an excerpt from this participant's reflection.

Reflection 6

He was so severe in class. So many students didn't like him. (*Stage 1: Participant No. 14, Female*)

However, a total of ten other participants made references to teacher “sternness” (in varying degrees) in their written reflections. Some examples included: “tell off me”; “serious [...] too strict”, “he is very severe”, “strict [...] sharp tongue [...] so strict [...] frightening”, “say often severe words”, and so on.

To explore this further, “sternness” was incorporated in the teacher attributes checklist for Stage Two. Interestingly, 15 male and 10 female (i.e., 20% of) participants selected “sternness” on the checklist. Reflection 7 typifies the dichotomous nature of this attribute.

Reflection 7

Her P.E. class is interesting. But she is sternness in my club. She was always mad at me. I didn't like her first. I had known her kind when I continued for a long

time. (*Stage 2: Participant No. 89, Female*)

In addition to the above participants, 11 (9%) other participants (i.e. who had not selected “Sternness”) contained elements of sternness in their reflections in Stage Two. Some examples include the following references to it: “he looked so afraid [...] I was scared [...] I was afraid”; “very strict and afraid teacher is angry”; “I was quite afraid”; “I was quite afraid [...] He said sorry soon”; “too strict”; and so on.

Emergent Sub-themes

In Stage One, three emergent sub-themes were identified from the written reflections, 1) Recognition: Gratitude/Respect (10); 2) Life-Changing Impact (10); and 3) Bonds & Ties (5). The presence of these sub-themes was further supported by the data collected in Stage Two of the study.

Recognition: Gratitude/Respect. In Stage Two, 27 of the reflections contained evidence of learners expressing gratitude or respect for the teacher. Reflection 8 is one example of this.

Reflection 8

Especially I respect Japanese language teacher in the high school. I am thankful to the teacher who made the chance to make my study hard. Thanks to my teacher, I become a good thinker. (*Stage Two: Participant No. 101, Male*)

Life-Changing Impact. An additional 14 examples of teachers having a life-changing impact on learners were observed in Stage Two. In many examples, a desire to emulate their teachers was expressed by participants. Reflection 9 is an indication of this.

Reflection 9

The teacher is the trigger by which then thought I would like to be become a teacher. I would like to become a teacher like him in the future. (*Stage Two: Participant No. 38, Male*)

Bonds & Ties. In addition to five reflections that suggested bonds and ties between good teachers and their students, for example, “She is like my mom. I have taken the contact with her even now. I like her very much.” (Participant No. 21, Female) in Stage One, another five reflections described the same phenomenon in Stage Two (see Reflection 10).

Reflection 10

But sometimes I talked him with LINE. He is traveling a trip around the world. Now he stays Brazil. I like to talk him and eat his meal. (*Stage One: Participant No. 4, Female*)

The researchers can only infer that participants who chose to express these sub-themes felt it was important to do so. In this respect, the authors regard their emergence as significant.

Discussion

Teacher Attributes

In relation to the first research aim, the most popularly selected attributes in Stage One and Stage Two showed consistency across the two stages. Despite some variance in frequency, by and large, many of the same attributes were present in the top five lists, regardless of participant gender and or education level.

Education Levels and Subjects

Regarding the second aim of this research, by combining the results from Stages One and Two, the most common education level by far was “High School” (77). Somewhat less frequent were “Junior High School” (35) and “Other” (29). The education levels that appeared least frequently were “Elementary School” (11) and “University” (5). To account for these findings would require further investigation, and thus, is beyond the scope of the current study. The range of subjects taught was very widespread. It was noted previously that the combining of all the education levels in Stage One and Stage Two identified English (36) and Math (36) as the most commonly taught subjects in the study.

Relationships

The following discussion relates to the four relationships which the current research aimed to explore.

Teacher Attributes and Learner Gender. It was observed that the five most commonly selected teacher attributes by male and female participants in Stage One were the same. The authors, however, are reluctant to assign significance to this alignment considering the small sample-size. With a much larger sample-size in Stage Two, greater variance was observed in the results. It is perhaps not surprising, then that, in contrast to Stage One results, there was partial rather than complete alignment of the most popularly selected teacher attributes.

Teacher Gender, Learner Gender, and Education Level. For reasons which cannot be determined from the data, participants referred to male teachers (76%) substantially more often than female teachers (24%), regardless of the participants' gender. Even when taking participant gender into account, the same was true. As was evidenced, female participants identified female teachers slightly (20%) more than male teachers when compared with the male participants. In contrast, slightly (20%) more male teachers were selected by the male participants than the female participants. Moreover, male teachers were also substantially more prevalent across the three most common education levels.

Emergent Attribute. The fact that 25 participants selected “Sternness” in the checklist in Stage Two, and that a further 11 references were made to it in the written reflections of 11 other participants, leads the authors to conclude that its presence in Stage One was not a random anomaly, but rather, an independent variable that may warrant further investigation. One plausible account for its presence in the data may be related to the success of the *sempai-kohai* relationship between teacher and learner in Japan (Hadley & Hadley, 1996). However, whether or to what extent the

participants considered “sternness” as a desirable teacher attribute is unclear.

Emergent Sub-Themes. The emergence of the three sub-themes from the written reflections in Stage One was collaborated by their presence in Stage Two. The authors regard these emergent sub-themes as a testament to the profound and long impact that good teachers can have on their learners.

Other Asian-based Studies: Similar and Contrasting Teacher Attributes. Several teacher attributes were popularly selected by participants in both the current study and by the three other Asian-based studies (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015; Nghia, 2015; Wichadee, 2010), these being ‘compassionate’, ‘good communicator’, ‘humorous’. Although ‘compassionate’ was referred to as being understanding of student anxiety in the classroom in Nghia, 2015), Other attributes that were popularly selected by participants in both the current study and in one or two of the other studies, such as, ‘caring’, ‘enthusiastic about teaching’ and ‘kind’ (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015 only) and ‘friendly’ (both Nghia, 2015; Wichadee, 2010), ‘honest’ (Nghia, 2015 only), ‘good listener’ and ‘knowledgeable’ (Wichadee, 2010 only).

Additionally, there were several teacher attributes not popularly selected in the current study but considered favorably by participants in at least two of the other studies, such as, ‘fair’ and ‘patient’ (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015; Wichadee, 2010), and ‘organized’ and ‘prepared’ (Nghia, 2015; Wichadee, 2010). There were also teacher attributes which were popularly selected by learners in the current study but were selected in only of each of the other studies, and those were ‘creative’, ‘patient’, self-confident’, ‘self-control’, and ‘unbiased’ (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015 only), and ‘motivational’ (Nghia, 2015 only).

Other Asian-based Studies: Similar and Contrasting Findings. There are several significantly similar findings between the current study and the other Asian-based studies. There were no significant gender differences for positive teacher attributes in the current study and the studies by Nghia (2015) and Wichadee (2010). While in relation to teacher attributes, either in the studies’ research design or by selection from participants, 15 of out the 25 attributes used in the current study were found in the study by Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2015 and 13 out of 25 in the study by Wichadee (2010).

In contrast with the current study, Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2015) did not have any findings on gender differences of participants’ perceptions on positive teacher attributes. While Nghia (2015) found that participants strongly favored teachers who behaved professionally, an attribute which was absent from the current study. Lastly, Wichadee (2010) noted that the top two positive teacher attributes were for teachers to treat students ‘interested in students’ and to be ‘helpful’. Yet these two attributes were neither listed by the researchers nor added by participants as optional extra attribute selections in the teacher attribute checklist of the current study.

Limitations

The authors recognize certain limitations of the current study. In relation to the qualitative data (i.e., written reflections), it is important to note that, in an interpretive paradigm, individual meanings can become lost within broader generalizations

(Samdahl, 1999). Moreover, the findings discussed are highly contextualized and, ultimately, such qualitative data requires a level of subjective interpretation by the researchers. Hence, the outcomes observed in the current study may be limited in their applicability to other researchers and in other contexts (Scotland, 2012). Turning to the quantitative data, although the attributes listed in the checklist were each accompanied by a Japanese translation (and checked by multiple native Japanese speakers for accuracy) for greater reliability, it is plausible, however, that individuals may have interpreted them differently. Lastly, English (and Math) teachers were among the most commonly selected teachers in this study. Whether the situational-settings of the current research – namely, 1) English language learners (i.e., the participants) and 2) English language teachers (i.e., the researchers) – had any bearing on the (relatively) high prevalence of English teachers in the data remains unknown. The authors acknowledge, however, that it may have.

Conclusions & Recommendations

In this study, and as found in previous research, learner perceptions of good teacher attributes can be influenced by a variety of factors, including gender and school level (Zhang & Watkins, 2007). The current study also found parallels with other studies, most notably Nghia (2015) and Wichadee (2010), in that no major differences were found in the attributes used to describe good teachers based on participants' gender. This was observed in both Stage One and Stage Two outcomes. Additionally, in the minds of the researchers at least, the reemergence of "Sternness" (25) in Stage Two in both the questionnaire data and in the written reflections, justified their decision to incorporate it in the checklist in the second stage. The reemergence of the sub-themes in Stage Two may help to dispel any notions that they were merely anomalous artifacts specific to the participants in the first stage. In the coming phases of this continuing research, the researchers hope to uncover evidence to account for 1) the dominating presence of male teachers in the current study, and 2) the strong presence of "sternness" in the data. Ultimately, the ramifications of outcomes discussed in this study should be considered in the context of teacher training and teacher evaluation. Finally, considering the broad scope of the current research, it is hoped this paper has provided teachers in a range of education levels with insights into learner perceptions of good teacher attributes and the various relationships that exist between them.

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Appendix A

Teacher Attributes Checklist

	Flexible		Friendly		<i>Compassionate</i>
	<i>Honest</i>		Fair		<i>Plays games</i>
	Humorous		Caring		Polite
	Prepared		<i>Good communicator</i>		Motivational
	Enthusiastic about teaching		Knowledgeable		<i>Self-confident</i>
	Kind		<i>Leader</i>		<i>Inspired</i>
	Creative		Organized		Empathetic
	Patient		Good listener		Unbiased
	<i>*Sternness</i>		Other		Other

Note: Attributes developed by the researchers are italicized. *Sternness was added for Stage Two use.

Appendix B

Student Consent form (including Student Questionnaire & Blog instructions)

Student Consent Form

Dear Student,

Blagoja Dimoski and Andrew Leichsenring invite you to participate in a research project for the purpose of:

Collecting data on student perceptions of teachers; and improving teachers' understanding of Japanese university student perceptions of teachers.

I, _____, Male / Female understand the purpose of the above research project, and I agree to participate in it voluntarily. Today's date is _____, _____, 2016.

Thank you for your participation.

Blagoja Dimoski and Andrew Leichsenring

Student Questionnaire

Choose one – mark X	Education Level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elementary school
<input type="checkbox"/>	Junior high school
<input type="checkbox"/>	High School
<input type="checkbox"/>	University
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Juku / Eikaiwa / Tutor (etc.) Please specify ()

My teacher was Male / Female

My teacher taught _____ (write the subject here).

Blog Activity

“Write an experience you had with one teacher (from elementary school to university) who you think was a good teacher for you. What happened? Why do you think that teacher was a good teacher?” *Use all of the five check-listed items in your blog posting. Minimum 100 words - Maximum 150 words in English.*

Appendix C

Ranking of Stage One teacher attributes by gender of participants and the totals.

Attributes	Male (n=13)	Male %	Female (n=22)	Female %	Total (n=35)	Total %
Friendly	11	85%	12	55%	23	66%
Knowledgeable	6	46%	12	55%	18	51%
Empathetic	4	31%	11	50%	15	43%
Enthusiastic about teaching	7	53%	8	36%	15	43%
Humorous	5	38%	9	41%	14	40%
Caring	5	38%	8	36%	13	37%
Compassionate	4	31%	8	36%	12	34%
Good listener	4	31%	4	18%	8	23%
Inspiring	4	31%	4	18%	8	23%
Motivational	1	8%	6	27%	7	20%
Honest	2	15%	4	18%	6	17%
Flexible	3	23%	1	5%	4	11%
Plays games	1	8%	3	14%	4	11%
Polite	-	-	4	18%	4	11%
Self-confident	1	8%	2	9%	3	9%
Creative	-	-	2	9%	2	6%
Fair	1	8%	1	5%	2	6%
Good communicator	1	8%	1	5%	2	6%
Kind	1	8%	1	5%	2	6%
Leader	2	15%	-	-	2	6%
Organized	-	-	1	5%	1	3%
Patient	1	8%	-	-	1	3%
Prepared	-	-	1	5%	1	3%
Unbiased	1	8%	-	-	1	3%

Appendix D

Ranking of Stage Two teacher attributes by gender of participants and the totals.

Attributes	Male (n=67)	Male %	Female (n=55)	Female %	Total (n=122)	Total %
Friendly	31	46%	32	58%	63	52%
Enthusiastic about teaching	33	49%	28	51%	61	50%
Empathetic	27	40%	32	58%	59	48%
Kind	27	40%	16	29%	43	35%
Knowledgeable	28	42%	12	22%	40	33%
Compassionate	17	25%	22	40%	39	32%
Polite	25	37%	11	20%	36	30%
Humorous	23	34%	12	22%	35	29%
Caring	16	24%	18	33%	34	28%
*Sternness	15	22%	10	18%	25	20%
Motivational	13	19%	9	16%	22	18%
Inspiring	9	13%	10	18%	19	16%
Good listener	7	10%	11	20%	18	15%
Honest	7	10%	9	16%	16	13%
Good communicator	9	13%	6	11%	15	12%
Fair	7	10%	5	9%	12	10%
Plays games	6	9%	5	9%	11	9%
Flexible	7	10%	2	4%	9	7%
Unbiased	5	7%	4	7%	9	7%
Patient	4	6%	2	4%	6	5%
Creative	4	6%	1	2%	5	4%
Self-confident	1	1%	4	7%	5	4%
Leader	3	4%	-	-	3	2%
Prepared	-	-	1	2%	1	1%
Organized	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: *Sternness was not an item on the teacher attribute checklist in Stage 1.

Appendix E

Combined results of Stage One & Stage Two for education level and subject.

Education Level	Sub- Totals (n=157)	Subject
High school	77	Art (1), Bible (1), Biology (1), Bookkeeping (1), Chemistry (2), Contemporary writings (1), English (14), English grammar (1), Environment (1), Japanese (7), Japanese history (4), Karate (1), Kyudo club (1), Math (21), Music (4), P.E. (3), P.E. & Club (1), Physics (2), School counsellor (1), Science (2), Social studies (3), Track & field (2), Unknown (1), World history (1)
Junior high school	35	Baseball (1), English (7), Geography (1), History (1), Japanese (2), Math (6), Music (2), P.E. (9), Science (2), Social Studies (2), Table tennis (1), Track and field club (1)
Other	29	
<i>Cram school (18)</i>		Abacus (1), English (7), English & Math (1), Contemporary writings (1), Japanese (1), Math (4), Math/English/Japanese (1), Society (1), Unknown (1)
<i>Tutor (5)</i>		Math (2). Math/English/Japanese (1), Music (2)
<i>Conversation school (4)</i>		English (4)
<i>Coach (2)</i>		Gymnastics (1), Tennis (1)
Elementary school	11	Homeroom teacher (1), Japanese (1), Many subjects (6), P.E. (3)
University	5	Biology (1), English (1), Logic (1), Science (2)
Total	157	

*Note. Student responses that do not conform to the notion of a formal academic subject