

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) TEACHER: A SURVEY

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Abstract

This study reports on students' perceptions on the characteristics of an effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire to which 196 students of English Language Education Department in one of the private universities in Yogyakarta responded. The data were taken from second-year, third-year, and fourth-year students. The voices of stakeholders in general, and students in particular, were needed to be included in identifying the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher. The results revealed that the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher which were included in the three categories namely personal and interpersonal characteristics, subject-matter knowledge, and approach to language teaching as perceived by the students belong to very important category. EFL teachers especially those who are working in tertiary education could use the results as a means to better understand themselves and to provide a more meaningful teaching. This can also help teachers in assessing the needs of their students for the betterment of the learning process.

Keywords: teachers' characteristics, effective teacher, EFL teachers

Introduction

For many years, the topic of teacher effectiveness has drawn numerous educational researchers' attention. It is widely acknowledged that the quality of teaching that a teacher possesses will give influence to the improvements of students' learning outcomes (Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Hajizadeh & Salahshour, 2013). To conduct an effective teaching, a teacher should possess a set of abilities in order to help the students to keep engaged in learning and to improve their learning outcomes. This was supported by Chen and Lin (2009) who defined an effective teacher as someone who is helpful for students' learning. In the context of the foreign language teaching, Borg (2006) reported that there are differences among foreign language teachers and teachers of other subjects especially in the content and methodology of teaching, the issue about native and non-native speaker, and the interaction between teacher and students.

As each of the students has the right to get the most effective education, there was a direct relationship between teacher and student that exists in the classroom. The effectiveness of a teacher was considered something that was fundamental for enhancing learning. Some studies revealed that teacher effectiveness was a crucial factor affecting the students' achievements. An effective teacher was the key factor in the teaching and learning process. The performance of a teacher can influence the students' progress. Although there have been studies conducted to explore behaviors and characteristics of foreign language teachers, there are still relatively few studies which addressed the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher in Indonesia (Khaerati, 2016; Abu & Halim, 2017; Said,

2017). More studies are important to be carried out to provide suggestions and guidance for the current EFL teachers as well as for the future. Thus, this study is aimed at investigating the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher in Indonesian contexts especially in post-secondary or university level students based on several characteristics among many that have been investigated previously.

The research focused on identifying the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher as perceived by the students of a private university based on the following three broad categories namely personal and interpersonal characteristics, subject-matter knowledge, and approach to language teaching. The researcher intended to find out how the respondents view these three broad category as researcher personally believed they covered the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher in general. Those characteristics were also considered to be suitable to the context of the study. It is because the researcher assumed that some teachers in the university where the study was investigated, have the characteristics to be called effective. The other reason was because of the time limitation that the researcher had to complete her education at the university. Thus, the researcher only took account on those three characteristics.

Research Question

This research is intended to answer the question about “What are the students’ perceptions on the characteristics of an effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher?”

Review of the Related Literature

Definition of Effective Teachers

An effective teacher has been defined as a teacher who is successful in assisting the students in their learning (Walker, 2012). Similar to this, Zamani and Ahangari (2016) explained that an effective teacher is someone that is recognized and cherished forever by the students as the teacher gives long lasting impacts on their journey while studying. They also state that being a teacher is not an easy job in which a dedicated teacher requires more outstanding personalities. An effective teacher should embrace the uniqueness. For example, remembering that every student is different based on the difference in their backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs (Zamani & Ahangari, 2016).

Diamond (as cited in Wichadee, 2010) argued that to be called an effective teacher, one must deliver useful and purposeful teaching and learning for students by conducting sets of precise procedures. The teacher effectiveness can be defined as sets of characteristics, behaviors, and competencies of a teacher in all level of education which make students able to grab the desired outcomes. This included the accomplishment of the goals and objectives of learning, for example being able to do problem-solving, having critical thinking, collaboration in working, as well as being able to be a good citizen (Hunt, 2009).

It can be concluded from those definitions described by the researchers that an effective teacher is a teacher who is able to help the students to become successful in their learning by possessing sets of abilities.

Characteristics of an Effective Teacher

As there are changes in teacher roles and methods of teaching in recent years, the demand for effective teachers who are considered well-qualified as the subjects and objects in the learning process as well as in the development has increased. This leads the importance of an effective teacher in education to become the recent issue on the surface (Avalos, 2011; Turhan & Arıkan, 2009). Moreover, Ramazani (2014) stated that several characteristics of an effective teacher are universal, but others are considered specific regarding the domain.

Thompson, Greer, and Greer (2004) mentioned twelve characteristics of an effective teacher including displaying fairness, having a positive outlook, being prepared, using a personal touch, possessing a sense of humor, possessing creativity, admitting mistakes, being forgiving, respecting students, maintaining high expectations, showing compassion, and developing a sense of belonging for students. In investigating the appropriate elements of an effective teacher, Clark and Walsh conveyed that the effectiveness of a teacher is related to the teacher's competencies namely discipline knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, personal knowledge, and content knowledge (as cited in Korkmaz & Yavuz, 2011).

Characteristics of Foreign Language (FL) Teachers

Educational researchers have conducted studies on the characteristics of effective teachers. Several characteristics of effective teachers are universal, but some others are domain-specific. In the study of Zamani and Ahangari (2016), it was argued that the effectiveness of the concept, does not follow a generic pattern. This means different patterns of a teacher's effectiveness may be the result of different subjects based on the perceptions of the teachers involved. For this reason, Borg (2006) contends that teachers are characterized by the subject they teach and also the common practices they share in teaching that subject. Borg (2006) also argues that the contextual factors may ultimately determine how the construct of a language teacher is conceptualized.

In his study on the distinctive characteristics of foreign language teachers, Borg (2006) adopted an exploratory study in which the data were collected from over 200 individuals. There were five groups of participants involved in the study. Two groups were experienced teachers, while the other two were pre-service teachers. The last group consisted of subject specialists from outside language teaching in order to provide an interdisciplinary perspective on the topic being investigated. The study was aimed at examining ways in which language teachers are seen to be different to teachers of other subjects. The findings stated that language teachers are seen to be distinctive in terms of the dynamic nature of the subject, the scope and complexity of the content of teaching, the range of materials, methods and activities available to language teachers, teacher-learner relationships, and issues relating to the status of native and non-native language teachers. From this study, Borg (2006) also argued that the characteristics of effective foreign language teacher may vary in different contexts so that the study also highlight the importance of examining language teachers' distinctiveness in localized and context specific ways.

Characteristics of an Effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teacher

Investigating the characteristics of Effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers is beneficial to both the teachers and the learners as well as the researchers (Ramazani, 2014). This will enable the teacher to check their own characteristics and their colleagues' perceptions toward language teaching and learning. They will try to understand the students' expectation as well as develop their pedagogical skills through reflection on their teaching that also develop the process of teaching and learning. For the students, they can recognize their teachers' perceptions and this will also enable them to change their beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning that are considered wrong previously.

For the example, building on the work of Borg, Lee (2010) investigated some of the unique characteristics of EFL teachers that distinguish them from teachers of other subjects from the perspectives of 163 Japanese college learners. The results of the study indicated that the participants perceived EFL teachers to be unique along four central dimensions. The first dimension is complex nature of the subject matter which explains that in English language teaching, the content and medium of instruction are the same, and it involves teachers and students operating in a language in which students are not yet competent. The second is the content of teaching. EFL teachers does not only teach the four skills and grammar, but they also develop learners' communication and cultural knowledge and skills. Teaching approach or approach to language teaching is the next dimension in which showing how EFL teachers maximize student involvement by encouraging more speaking in class and through judicious correction of student errors. The last is teacher personality where the teacher in this context displays the importance of having positive attitudes and enthusiasm toward students and the subject being taught.

A study conducted by Chen (2012) indicated that there are two broad categories regarding to personal trait-related and classroom teaching-related characteristics. Personal trait-related was concerned with emotion, kindness, fairness, lenience and responsibility, while classroom teaching-related deals with skills and techniques of delivering the lesson and making error correction, language used in teaching, and classroom management. Regarding to lesson delivery, Barnes and Lock's study (2010) conveyed that it was considered importance by emphasizing the use of numerous teaching methods and teaching materials as well as the distribution of group work.

Some experts attempted to define the characteristics of effective EFL teachers. For the example, Richards (2001) stated the core components that build teachers characteristics to become effective. The first is practical knowledge which describes the teachers' repertoire of classroom techniques and strategies. The second is content knowledge which highlights the teachers' understanding of the subject of TESOL, e.g., Pedagogical grammar, phonology, teaching theories, second language acquisition, as well as the specialized discourse and terminological of language teaching. The third is contextual knowledge which explains the teacher's familiarity with the school or institutional context school norms, and knowledge of the learners are including cultural and other relevant information. The next is pedagogical knowledge which implies the ability to restructure content knowledge for teaching purposes, and to plan, adapts and improvises. The following core component is personal knowledge which describes the teachers' personal beliefs and principles and his or her individual approach to teaching. The

last one is reflective knowledge which is the teachers' capacity to reflect on and assess his or her own practice. Some of those characteristics mentioned by Richards (2000) are similar to Brown (2000) who stated that good EFL teachers must have the following characteristics namely technical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, and personal qualities.

Those studies demonstrate that there are differences in how Effective EFL teachers are characterized that are dependent on the setting in which teaching and learning occur. Thus, it can be said that the differences found among the various studies indicate the ways FL teachers are characterized are context specific (Brosh, 1996; Park & Lee, 2006). The fact that the environments in EFL English class are considered important, this also highlights the importance of the existence of an effective EFL teacher as they are the prominent 'source of input' for the learners. Thus, the presence of an effective EFL teacher is the crucial need in an EFL classroom in order to enhance the quality of learning and the efficiency of educational systems. (Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted quantitative approach using cross-sectional survey design. This type of survey design also provides information in a short amount of time, such as the time required for administering the survey and collecting information (Creswell, 2012).

Research Population and Sample

The population of this research was second-year up to fourth-year students of English Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta. The population of the current research was chosen based on the experiences in taking numerous courses related to teaching English as foreign languages. From the sample size calculation service for a probability sampling which is offered by Cohen et al. (2011), the sample size in this study was 196 respondents from the total population of 366.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in the study was structured questionnaire because it can enable the patterns to be observed and the final form will involve a range of possible responses that can be reasonably foreseen (Cohen et al., 2011). The type of responses that provided was a rating scale. The questionnaire items of this study was adapted from the research conducted by Kourieos and Evripidou (2013) with a total of 34 items from three categories used for the final version and the items were randomized.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher conducted a self-administered questionnaire in the presence of the researcher because it can enable the researcher to gather the data from large number of respondents simultaneously at one time and give immediate response to the respondents in case they find any difficulties while filling out the questionnaire items (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher invited the respondents which were spread into the selected classes from second-year, third-year, and fourth-year to

complete the questionnaire items provided for the present study. To make sure that the respondents understand what they should do with the questionnaire, the researcher was explaining the direction.

Data Analysis

The data analysis used in the research was descriptive statistics. The researcher described the data obtained statistically using numbers. In descriptive statistics, the researcher tried to find out the frequency of the data. Rating scales were used in this research as it was able to establish the sensitivity degree and diverse responses while maintaining to generate numbers (Cohen et al., 2011). There were four categories: (1) Not Important at All, (2) Not Important, (3) Important, and (4) Very Important. The class interval for the each category can be seen from the table below.

Scale	Category
1 – 1.75	Not Important at All
1.76 – 2.5	Not Important
2.6 – 3.25	Important
3.26 – 4	Very Important

From the frequency table, the researcher was able to identify the mean value of the questionnaire items as well as the mean score for each item. By knowing the mean value and mean score, the researcher would be able to see what category each item belong to.

Research Results and Discussion

Personal and Interpersonal Characteristics

This sub-section demonstrated and discussed the results with aspects of the teacher's personality and attitudes towards the students.

Rank	An effective language teacher should:	N	Mean	SD
1	Be friendly to students	196	3.73	.476
2	Treat students fairly regardless of achievement	196	3.72	.502
3	Be open-minded	196	3.63	.562
4	Encourage students to express and discuss their needs for language learning	196	3.52	.550
5	Praise effort	196	3.49	.586
6	Take into consideration students' difficulties with the foreign language	196	3.45	.593
7	Be eager to help students in and outside the classroom	196	3.40	.612
8	Use authority to maintain discipline	196	3.36	.652
9	Express confidence in students' language abilities	196	3.26	.623

Data collected in this study revealed that the students attached the importance to EFL teachers' personal trait-related characteristics. Most of the students perceived that it is essential for the EFL teacher to have good personal and interpersonal characters. Some other studies in the same field also shared the similar discovery that most of the students preferred the EFL teachers with good personal and interpersonal characters (Brosh, 1996; Sishavan & Shadegi, 2009; Lee, 2010; Chen, 2012; Kourieous & Evripidou, 2013).

From the result, the issue of friendliness, fairness, and open mindedness are highly appreciated mainly by the respondents. This means that students prefer to be taught by teacher who can create good atmosphere, treat the students fairly and equitably, and teacher who are able to be open minded. This result is in accordance with Chen and Lin (2009) in which reveal that being friendly and being open-minded are among the top five characteristics of effective EFL teacher.

Penner (1992), Liando (2010), and Chen (2012) also have similar results on their studies. Being able to praise students for their effort, being eager to help students in and outside classroom, as well as taking care of students' difficulties are also important. This is in line with Chen and Lin (2009) which reveals that being enthusiastic in teaching is the most important characteristics for effective teacher. They also mention the importance of showing respects and caring is important in order to help students with their learning process. The availability and the willingness to sustain interest and motivation among students are also desirable characteristics that can promote effective learning as those can create such good atmosphere in the classroom (Penner, 1992; Borg, 2006; Zamani & Ahangari, 2016).

Subject-matter Knowledge

The following sub-section describes the result which focus on the EFL teacher's competence of the target language and the awareness of language learning theories.

Rank	An effective language teacher should:	N	Mean	SD
1	Have a broad vocabulary in the FL	196	3.77	.457
2	Have a sound knowledge of the English grammar	196	3.63	.553
3	Be familiar with language learning theories	196	3.43	.617
4	Use English competently	196	3.35	.585
5	Be acquainted with the target culture	196	3.09	.717

Regarding the second thematic area, which focuses on the EFL teacher's competence of the target language and awareness of language learning theories, the results show that having broad vocabulary in the FL and having a sound knowledge of the English grammar are the highest among the items to the theme discussed. Similar to this results, studies conducted by Brosh (1996), Park and Lee (2006), as well as Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul (2012) view that a sound command of foreign languages gave teachers the linguistic freedom necessary to personalize lessons according to students' proficiency levels and learning styles.

It is such interesting to note that these two items were perceived as more important than the ability to familiarize with the language learning theory and to

use the language competently. In relation to this, Kourieous and Evripidou (2013) assumed that the respondents' previous language learning experiences might influence their beliefs in the conceptions of effective language teaching. From the language experiences, the background of language education focused on the instruction of the formal aspects of the language, which emphasized on grammar and vocabulary development are contrast to the reference limitation to the target culture.

Approach to Language Teaching

The third sub-section addressed the aspects of an EFL teacher's approach which concentrated on how the new content was introduced, explained and evaluated and how the instructional material and activities can be best used to facilitate learning.

Rank	An effective language teacher should:	N	Mean	SD
1	Use activities which draw learners' attention to specific grammatical features	196	3.58	.535
2	Simplify his/her classroom language to facilitate comprehension of what is being said	196	3.57	.546
3	Make frequent use of other material	196	3.44	.592
4	Design or select material according to students' major	196	3.43	.555
5	Address error by immediately providing explanation as to why students' responses are incorrect	196	3.40	.596
6	Set activities which expose students to the target culture	196	3.35	.602
7	Provide opportunities for students to use English beyond the classroom setting	196	3.34	.625
8	Use English as the predominant means of classroom communication	196	3.34	.648
9	Thoroughly explain new grammar rules before asking students to practice relevant structure	196	3.31	.616
10	Not grade language production (speaking/writing) primarily for grammatical accuracy	196	3.30	.532
11	Set activities which require students to interact with each other in English	196	3.29	.601
12	Expose students to real life topics	196	3.28	.606
13	Correct students immediately after making a grammar mistake during communicative activities	196	3.28	.727
14	Set activities which require students to work individually	196	3.14	.641
15	Set activities which require students to work in pairs or small groups	196	3.13	.632
16	Grade written assignments predominantly for effort and content	196	3.03	.686

17	Integrate computer-aided instruction into FL teaching	196	3.01	.612
18	Grade written assignments predominantly for grammatical and accuracy	196	2.28	.668

The last category is approach to language teaching. This addresses aspects of an EFL teacher's approach which concentrate on how the new content is introduced, explained and evaluated and how the instructional material and activities can be best used to facilitate learning. From the results, there are several issues which are interesting to further discuss.

The first issue is the use of other materials than the use of textbooks or course book. The use of textbooks can make students feel bored and due to the content of the textbook which is uninteresting or repetitive, sustaining the motivation of the students will be problematic for the teacher no matter how hard they may try (Harmer, 2007; Kourieous & Evripidou, 2013). This indicates that instead of following the textbook rigidly, the students prefer their teacher to provide more authentic materials which will enable them to use the language in more meaningful contexts. The respondents also pointed out that they expected their teacher to use activities which draw learners' attention to specific grammatical features, make frequent use of other materials, and design or select materials according to students' major. Thus the teacher should be more creative in order to successfully draw students' attention (Thompson, Greer, & Greer, 2004).

Error correction during communicative activities is the next issue. The responses in this study regarding error correction during communicative activities are expected to provide a better understanding of how students seem to benefit from different approaches to error correction. From the data, the respondents viewed the importance of error correction in communicative activities especially by adding immediate correction and providing explanation after making mistakes. Azar and Molavi (as cited in Kourieous & Evripidou, 2013) indicated, in order to have a successful learning and teaching process it is necessary to consider EFL learners' reactions and feelings towards oral error correction and to understand that they have different preferences in the way they like to be corrected.

The next issue is interaction among students in the target language. The results revealed that respondents saw the importance on communicative activities which require them to interact with each other using the target language. The importance on the use of group work in the EFL classroom was also perceived by respondents as it can promote greater degree of students' involvement. The importance of classroom interaction and group work reported by the participants of this study is supported by some other relevant studies in the field which also highlighted the functions of classroom interaction and the importance of working in group for the students (Bell, 2005; Lee, 2010; Barnes & Lock, 2010).

From these results, it could be concluded that second, third, and fourth year students of English Language Education Department at a private university in Yogyakarta viewed it was very important for the teacher to have characteristics that were included in the three categories namely personal and interpersonal characteristics, subject-matter knowledge, and approach to language teaching. Taking the most prominent characteristics noted by the respondents into account, the profile of an effective EFL teacher can be established as the one who has broad

FL vocabulary, exhibits friendliness, fairness, and open-mindedness, has a sound knowledge of the English grammar, provide activities that can grab students' attention, simplifies the classroom instruction, encourages and praise students' efforts, and takes into consideration about students' difficulties in learning foreign language.

Conclusion

Students might have different perceptions in identifying the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher. Their experience in taking numerous courses which were taught by diverse teachers may influence the way they perceive what the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher one should possess. This leads to the condition where students may consider that some teachers are considered effective but some others are not. Based on the results of the research, the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher which were included in the three categories namely personal and interpersonal characteristics, subject-matter knowledge, and approach to language teaching as perceived by the students belong to very important category. The mean scores for each category were 3.51, 3.33, and 3.28. In conclusion, the students think that in order to be an effective EFL teacher, it is very important for the teacher to possess such desirable characteristics that are included in those three broad categories.

EFL teachers, especially those who are working in tertiary education should use these results as reflection to better understand themselves and also the needs of their students in order to enhance the learning process. The results of the study have important implications for the language teachers, especially on how important it is for the teacher to possess knowledge and skills and also how important it is to have better preparation before conducting the learning. The issue of communication and creativity are also important for the teacher. In order to create good atmosphere in the classroom, building good relationship by having interactive teacher-students communication is also considered important. The use of other materials and increasing creativity in designing activities will be helpful in order to maintain students' motivation in the learning process.

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