

# The Perspectives of Students in the College of Basic Education on the Characteristics of Effective English Language Teachers

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## Abstract

This paper presents a research study designed to investigate the characteristics of effective teachers of English and the uniqueness of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The research is based on four general categories: English language proficiency, educational perception, organization and communication skills, social and emotional skills. These general categories will be viewed in the light of students' perception, the students of English Language at the Faculty of Basic Education in the State Kuwait. The sample was chosen randomly from students of the English Department to measure independent variables Academy in correlation with academic variables. For example, English language courses taken, years of schooling, and levels of English proficiency. The researchers based their research on data collected through a questionnaire based on Lickert's five-point rating distributed to 150 students. It is expected that the results reveal students' belief in the importance of the categories listed above with emphasis on the uniqueness of EFL teachers in comparison with teachers of other disciplines. This study contributes to the understanding of what students expect from EFL teachers; in addition, it will enable the understating of what students believe is required from them as teachers of English in the future. It is expected that this study will contribute to the field of EFL in the College of Basic Education and the Department of Education in Kuwait University, as it would reflect what the English Departments in these colleges need in order to increase students' awareness of the importance and role of EFL teachers.

**Keywords:** teaching, characteristics, language, teacher, EFL, awareness

## 1. Introduction

Teaching a foreign language has been investigated worldwide, yet limited studies were based in Arabic speaking countries in general, and Kuwait specifically. This paper takes a close look at EFL teaching and the perspective in the eyes of undergraduate students studying at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait. The paper is based on the assumption that EFL teachers are expected to be unique compared to teachers of other subjects. This uniqueness is investigated in the light of four main skill categories: language proficiency, teacher awareness, organisation and communication abilities, and social and emotional skills.

This paper will start by introducing a review of literature concerned with teaching characteristics in general. Afterwards, studies of the characteristics of language teachers will be viewed from the point of view of teachers, followed by the students' perspective. Research on the perspective of EFL teachers in the opinion of teachers and students in the Arab world will later be provided.

The second part of the paper involves a clear display of the methodology and instruments utilised in the current study, showing the justification for the use of certain methods and contents. This will be followed by a thorough introduction of the results and analysis of the numbers obtained. A discussion, in the next part, will demonstrate the relationship between findings of the current study and different studies, followed by a conclusion, which includes a brief review of findings, recommendations, and limitations.

It is necessary to point out that this study uniquely added independent variables to clearly demonstrate the effect of social and academic situations of Kuwaiti students on their perspective. Other studies on the characteristics of EFL teachers have not used the independent variables (later shown under 3.2). Yet, the authors feel that the use of such variables would be considered a valuable resource during analysis. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the field of EFL teaching, bringing into light the expectations and uniqueness of EFL teaching in

Kuwait and internationally.

## 2. Literature Review

Teacher characteristics and teaching behaviour are crucial factors that affect student motivation and learning. Research findings suggest that teaching practices may influence student achievement (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1994). Also, effective learning depends on a large extent on teachers and their behaviour in the classroom (Markley, 2004). Benson et al. (2001) believe that an effective teacher is the one who has the ability to present information in a clear, understanding and motivating manner. Other attributes, like strong content knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills and knowledge of context were also emphasized (Clark & Walsh, 2002). However, it was found that students rated the characteristic ‘teacher-student interaction’ the most. Other characteristics also have showed to be important.

### 2.1 Characteristics of a Good Teacher

Research on the characteristics of good teachers started decades ago (Medley, 1972, in Saafin, 2005). However, most of the research done focused on soliciting the perceptions of teachers rather than students (Johnson & Roellke, 1999; Verner, 2000). For example, Verner (2000) interviewed 17 teachers to investigate the qualities of effective teaching. The most reoccurring characteristics reported were: being interested in teaching, supports students during learning, shows positive interpersonal skills with students, is available to students, and uses humour in interaction with students.

A comprehensive list on effective teaching is provided by Blum (1984, cited in Richards, 2001) who listed 12 characteristics such as, giving clear and focused instruction, monitoring students’ progress, using class time properly, having positive interpersonal skills with students and using rewards to encourage students.

Other researchers were interested in soliciting the opinions of students on the characteristics of good teachers (Pozo-Munoz, Reboloso-Pacheco, & Fernandez-Ramirez, 2000; Hubbard, 2001). To identify the characteristics of good teaching and learning, Kim (2010) surveyed the opinions of 249 Korean EFL university students. Results showed students generally favour learner-centered teaching, a teacher with good teaching, communicative, interactive and cooperative skills.

Although there was no consensus in the literature on what makes good teachers, some characteristics were redundant such as, respecting students, explaining things well, having good interpersonal skills, having a sense of humour, using a variety of methods, using technology in the classroom, encouraging students to participate, and being enthusiastic (Saafin, 2005). More specifically, three characteristics were more frequently mentioned, clarity of teaching, humour and classroom management.

Research was also interested in comparing teachers’ and students’ opinions (Omeara, 2007). Liando (2010), for example, examined the perceptions of students and teachers at university level about good teacher characteristics. Both students and teachers gave higher emphasis on teacher characteristics like friendliness, humour, patience and fairness more than academic skills. They reported that teachers need to be intelligent, make the course interesting and explain things well.

### 2.2 Characteristics of Language Teachers

However, teachers of different subjects may require different characteristics specific to that subject (Neumann, 2001; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). Girard (1977, cited in Borg 2006), presented a list of the main characteristics of language teachers like, making the course interesting, teaching good pronunciation, explaining clearly, having good English pronunciation, fair, patient and allowing student participation. Lee (2010) further notes that foreign language teachers were different from other subject teachers. In a later study, Prodromou (1991) reported being friendly, patient, giving good notes, playing games and telling jokes as characteristics of good language teachers. As Foote et al. (2000) note, teachers’ relationship with students is crucial. Teachers need to show interest in students’ emotional world.

#### 2.2.1 Characteristics of EFL Teachers from Teachers’ Perspective

In foreign language teaching, research was done either on teachers’ perceptions or on students’ perceptions or on teachers’ and students’ perceptions together. Many studies looked at the teachers’ opinion of the characteristics of an EFL teacher. One of the main studies was conducted by Borg (2006) analysed the definitions of 200 practicing and prospective English language teachers from different contexts about the differences between English teachers and teachers of other domains. Findings showed language teaching to be more complex than other subjects and thus language teachers need to update their methodological knowledge and have a more positive relationship with students.

Shishvan and Sadeghi (2009) pointed out that qualified English language teachers are crucial to the success of any educational system. Being proficient in English is believed to be an important factor in foreign language (FL hereafter) teaching. Thompson (2008) further adds that good English language teachers have a combination of good teaching skills and positive personality traits; however, Liando (2010) argues that teacher competence is one of the factors affecting students' motivation.

To investigate the teaching behaviour and attitude of effective English language teachers as perceived by 457 post secondary foreign language teachers, Reber (2001) listed a number of characteristics needed for a qualified English language teachers such as, showing personal interest in target language and culture, using target language competently, using groups to involve students, catering for students' needs, and using English in classroom communication. These characteristics can be grouped under three categories namely, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011).

Similarly, Bell (2005) identified the characteristics of effective foreign language teachers from a survey on FL teachers in the U.S. Findings showed strong consensus on the main characteristics of FL teachers such as enthusiasm, competence in the TL, use of group work to involve pupils, error correction, focus on form and culture. On similar grounds, Mullock (2003) surveyed pre-service English language teachers' perceptions of the qualities of effective English language teachers. Four characteristics were emphasized, knowledge of the subject, teaching skills, language proficiency, and cross-cultural knowledge and skills.

### 2.2.2 Characteristics of EFL Teachers from the Students' Perspective

Students also played a major role in the investigation of EFL teachers' characteristics. One example of the exploration of the characteristics of EFL teachers in students' perspective was Lee's (2010) solicited the opinion of 163 Japanese first year college students. Findings revealed that the most important characteristics were "linguistic competence in grammar", "speaking", "listening", "reading", "writing" and "culture", "using students' L1 in class", "encouraging speaking", and "having a positive attitude".

Like Barnes (2013) and Lee (2010), Arıkan (2008) explored the qualities of an effective English language teacher from 100 Turkish students and found that effective teachers' qualities fall into three categories. The first category is "personal qualities" and it includes "being friendly", "caring", "fair" and "humorous". The next category is "professional qualities" and it includes "being fluent in English", and "using games". Finally, "pedagogical qualities" and they include "teaching grammar effectively", "having correct pronunciation" etc.

Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2009) also conducted a study by asking teachers of English in Iran about the qualities of English teachers and their students. They found that language mastery, social interaction, and psychological and emotional states were the most important traits.

Finally, Witcher (2003) tried to explore the most effective characteristics of effective English teachers. He found that the top five characteristics of effective English teachers were "being enthusiastic", "friendly", "open-minded", "caring" and "respecting students". A good relationship with students is a vital factor to be an effective English teacher. He concluded that being enthusiastic is the most important characteristic.

### 2.2.3 Characteristics of EFL Teachers in the Arab World

Although the bulk of the research has been conducted on perceptions of EFL students, studies done on perceptions of EFL Arab students were scant. One of the earlier studies in the Arab world was conducted by Saafin (1999). He solicited the perceptions of 136 Arab tertiary students attending an intensive English program at the University of Sharjah in UAE about the characteristics of effective EFL teachers. Results of the questionnaire and interview revealed students reporting 'interpersonal rapport with students' such as "respecting and giving advice to students", "being humorous", "friendly", "fair", "caring" and "patient" as important characteristics. Those were followed by "teaching and organization skills" such as, "using a variety of teaching methods", "knowing their subject matter", "catering for students' abilities", "checking understanding" and "explaining well". In a later study, Saafin (2005) interviewed 17 and surveyed 163 EFL Arab students who attended intensive English courses for one year before joining their vocational programs taught in English. Two themes emerged, "instructional skills" and "human characteristics". "Instructional skills" include "teaching approach", "learning resources", "interactions" and "management". "Human characteristics" include, "being friendly", "flexible", "helping and encouraging students", etc.

As seen above, most of the characteristics of effective EFL teachers fall into three categories, "instructional skills", "personal skills" and "teacher-student relationship". It seems that "teacher-student relationship" and "teacher personality" are the most important traits followed by "instructional skills". It is suggested that these factors affect student motivation the most, which reflects on their learning. It is also suggested that students

probably suffer from teachers' ill-treatment and this is reflected in their choice of the most important characteristics.

Since, policy makers, educationalists and teacher trainers plan curriculum and training sessions to prepare teachers to provide students with the best experiences of learning. It would be important to find out about students' opinions to guide policy makers and teachers to readjust their plans, methods and techniques to cater for students' needs and to achieve their goals.

In spite of the fact that many research conducted on the characteristics of EFL teachers has mainly focused on EFL students' perceptions, very little research has been conducted on college EFL Arab students in EFL contexts. Knowing about college EFL Arab students' perceptions will greatly contribute to our understanding of EFL students' perceptions. It will also add to the literature on college EFL students' perceptions of effective EFL teachers. Hence the above study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the characteristics of an EFL teacher in the point of view of English major students in CBE?
- 2) How are EFL teachers unique?
- 3) Is the job of an EFL teacher more difficult? Why?

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 The Participants*

The participants in this study were 150 EFL undergraduate students in the English department in the College of Basic Education in Kuwait (CBE hereafter). The students participating are all female (as there are no male students in the English major), and from different ages and stages in college. The reason this particular group of students was chosen was based on the fact that when graduating, these students will become EFL teachers. Hence, they would have more to reflect on the issue understudy than any other students.

#### *3.2 Instruments*

The data was collected through a questionnaire based on Likert's five-point rating scale starting from "totally agree" to "totally disagree", students were asked to leave the statement empty if they felt the answer is "don't know". 28 questions were distributed into four main categories; namely, EFL teacher proficiency, EFL teacher awareness, EFL teacher organisation and communication skills, and EFL teacher social and emotional skills. The 28 statements were adopted from Borg's (2006) classification of the characteristics of EFL teachers and the uniqueness of EFL teaching. In the beginning of the questionnaire, the participants were asked about their age, stage in CBE, marital status, nationality and GPA (independent variables). The use of such variables was believed to prove a better insight on individuality between students and its affect on general outcomes. Hence, independent variables were added to formulate more vivid views. These variables helped later to connect answers to social and academic status.

#### *3.3 Data Collection and Analysis*

The questionnaire was distributed randomly to English major CBE students. The researchers supervised the distribution and collecting of questionnaires, and were available at all time for any concerns or inquiries. The data was later entered in SPSS to be analysed. Frequency and mean for every question was obtained in general, in addition to the analysis of the answers in light of the social and academic variables (independent variables). Significance was constantly obtained through a one-way, two-way, or multi ANOVA tests. The interaction of the social and academic variables resulted in highly significant patterns.

### **4. Results**

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections: the first part covered social and academic aspects; namely, age, social status, nationality, years in CBE and GPA. The second part contains 28 statements to be answered in a likert scale starting from totally agree to totally disagree. The statements were divided into four main categories; under each category laid a group of statements that analyse in detail the qualities students expect EFL teachers to exhibit.

#### *4.1 EFL Teacher's Language Proficiency*

The first statement expressed the belief that the job of an EFL teacher is more difficult because of the constant need of the use of English while teaching. Most students agreed with this statement (56.7%), while 30.7% disagreed. In addition, the majority of students agreed that being non-native speakers of English makes the job of an EFL teacher more difficult.

Although most students agreed that the job of an EFL teacher is difficult because mastering a language takes

time, some (27.3%) disagree. When age interacted with GPA, the significance was  $p=0.011$ , where significance is set at  $p\leq 0.05$ . The significance might have occurred due to the fact that the youngest age group with the lowest GPA are the most who agreed with this statement. 48% of participants agreed that comparing non-native EFL teachers with native speakers adds more challenge to the job.

The first category has shown an overall agreement that language proficiency is an important characteristic of an EFL teacher. This unique factor, as participating students believe, adds a challenging affect to the job of an EFL teacher.

#### 4.2 EFL Teacher's Educational Awareness

When the second part of the questionnaire was analysed. A general agreement on the importance of educational awareness was reflected. Most students agreed that an EFL teacher should encourage 'student involvement' (53.3%). When testing the results in ANOVA, it was found that age played a major in showing significance. Significance was found to be  $p=0.029$ , where significance is calculated at  $p=0.05$ . This significance occurred as participants in the older age group did not agree that they had more responsibility towards students' involvement in the classroom. When measuring the significance of years in CBE by the current statement, significance was found at  $p=0.007$ . In addition, a two way ANOVA by GPA by status also showed significance of  $p=0.018$ .

When answering the statement "EFL teachers help students gain skills relative to life, the majority of students agreed. A one-way ANOVA test by nationality showed significance (0.038); this is due to the fact that non-Kuwaiti students agreed significantly more than Kuwaiti students. Moreover, a two-way ANOVA by GPA by status on the statement showed significance of  $p=0.050$ . The majority of students agreed that an EFL teacher is expected to be more flexible than teachers of other subjects. A two-way ANOVA by GPA by status showed significance of  $p=0.019$ .

Significance was also found with in the statement "EFL teachers spend more time preparing". A two way ANOVA by age by years in CBE showed significance of  $p=0.041$ . In addition, an ANOVA test by age by nationality was also shown to be significant ( $p=0.013$ ). Another two-way ANOVA was found to be significant: by GPA by status has shown  $p=0.026$ . Not only did most participants believe an EFL teacher would need more time preparing, but also many believed they are expected to use progressive methods. A two way ANOVA by GPA by status showed significance ( $p=0.018$ ).

Another feature of an EFL teacher agreed upon by many students is their use of authentic activities. A two-way ANOVA by GPA by age showed  $p=0.036$ ; this is due to the disagreement of many students with an average GPA and young age (21-30) with this statement. In addition, a two-way ANOVA by GPA by status showed significance of  $p=0.036$ . It was also generally agreed that EFL teachers were better trained. However, a one-way ANOVA by age showed  $p=0.044$ , where significant is calculated at  $p\leq 0.05$ .

Most participants agreed that an EFL teacher is able to know their students' strengths and weaknesses. A one-way ANOVA test showed significance by year in CBE (0.030), as students who spent more than four years in CBE totally disagreed. Another one-way ANOVA by status showed significance, where 30% of married participants showed disagreement. When asked about encouraging more speaking in class, most participants agreed that that was a feature of an EFL teacher. Significance was found when age interacted with GPA (0.036), and GPA interacted with status (0.006). Older students, however, tend to dismiss the efficiency of that role in learning. Seniority, GPA and marital status have also played a role in that regard (shown in Table 1).

Table 1. ANOVA test EFL teacher educational skills by marital status

Social status	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Married	3.38	26	1.329
Divorced/widowed	2.60	10	1.713
Bachelorette	3.48	114	1.397
Total	3.41	150	1.415

As shown in Table 1, divorced/widowed participants mostly agree with the importance of educational skills.

Meticulous lesson planning and the use of progressive teaching techniques have also been suggested to be important in raising EFL teachers' proficiency. The issue, however, has been perceived differently by students from different age groups, marital status and GPA as can be seen below in Table 2.

Table 2. Dependent variable: the use of progressive methods

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
GPA	1.017	4	.254	.164	.956
status	5.238	2	2.619	1.691	.189
age	12.612	3	4.204	2.715	.048
GPA * status	13.839	6	2.306	1.489	.018
GPA * age	10.735	6	1.789	1.155	.335
status * age	5.061	2	2.530	1.634	.199
GPA * status * age	3.467	2	1.733	1.119	.330

As shown in Table 2, significance is seen by age, and by GPA by status

As for the utilization of authentic class activities, the study indicates a general agreement on the importance of implementing such activities. Students of older age, however, seem to significantly disagree most (as seen in table 3). An interaction of students' GPA and marital status has also affected the results in this regard.

Table 3. The mean of "they use authentic activities" and age

Age group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
16-20	3.32	97	1.263
21-30	3.37	43	1.323
31-40	3.33	6	1.506
+41	5.00	3	0.0
Total	3.35	150	1.285

As seen in Table 3, the mean in 41+ age group was high.

#### 4.3 EFL Teacher's Organisation and Communication Skills

The most controversial statement in the questionnaire was the statement "EFL teachers encourage communication Skills." This controversy was reflected in several ANOVA tests conducted to calculate significance, where significance is tested at  $f < 0.05$ . In this respect, age showed  $p = 0.015$ , by age by GPA  $p \leq 0.005$ , by years in CBE by GPA  $p = 0.043$ , and by GPA by status  $p = 0.007$ . In addition, most students believed that EFL teaching involves more than the four skills. Participants aged 31-40 did not agree much (50% disagreed).

The majority of participants disagreed that "EFL teaching means correcting every mistake". A two-way ANOVA by GPA by status showed significance of  $p = 0.05$ . The participants generally agreed that an EFL teacher should be careful when projecting mistakes (see Table 4 below). Significance was found with the variable "years spent in CBE", where participants, who spent more than four years in CBE totally disagreed. They also disagreed that EFL teaching is more successful when focusing on communicative skills. Moreover, a two-way ANOVA test by age by GPA showed  $p = 0.037$  and by years by status  $p = 0.044$ .

Table 4. The mean of the statement "they should be careful when projecting mistakes"

Age group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
16-20	3.34	97	1.249
21-30	3.46	43	1.224
31-40	2.83	6	.753
+41	5.00	4	0.0
Total	3.37	150	1.228

As seen in Table 4, the mean is highest in age 41+.

Most students agreed that EFL teachers should focus on grammar. Significance of  $p \leq 0.001$  was found in the years in CBE where most participants who agreed where in their first and second year. In addition most students displayed their belief that an EFL teacher should encourage more speaking in class, with age, GPA and marital status, actively affecting their responses as shown in Table 5.

This part has shown the least agreement among students and the affect of the students' GPA and marital status has shown to be the most affective independent variables in terms of significant findings.

Table 5. Dependent variable: they encourage more speaking in class

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gpa	5.727	4	1.432	.806	.524
Status	9.678	2	4.839	2.725	.070
Age	8.132	3	2.711	1.526	.036
GPA * status	15.446	6	2.574	1.450	.006
GPA * age	11.769	6	1.961	1.105	.364
Status * age	1.516	2	.758	.427	.654
GPA * status * age	2.124	2	1.062	.598	.551

As seen in Table 5 significance was found by status, by age, and by GPA by status

#### 4.4 EFL Teacher's Social and Emotional Skills

This category represents the forth and final skill category in the questionnaire. An investigation of the numbers obtained, this category has shown the social attitude of an EFL teacher is one of the most important characteristics in the perspective of the participants. Most students also agreed that EFL teachers have a better and closer relationship with students. All divorced and widowed participants disagreed where a one-way ANOVA test showed  $p=0.02$ . A two-way ANOVA test by GPA by Status also showed significance (0.039).

Does English create a barrier between the teacher and the students? Most participants agree with this idea (71%), and participants over 40 years old completely agree, showing significance ( $p \leq 0.001$ ). In addition, the majority of participants believe that an EFL teacher has a higher status than other teachers. Moreover, they showed agreement and strong agreement with the statement "EFL teachers are motivating" (65.4%). Significance was found in age ( $p=0.027$ ), age by GPA ( $p=0.027$ ) and in GPA by status (0.041).

Mainly most participants showed agreement on the importance of the role of the EFL teacher and the unique characteristics of the EFL teacher. Major significance was found in Age and GPA. The data has also shown that significance was mainly found in age (in a one way ANOVA) and in a two-way ANOVA, when GPA interacts with status.

## 5. Discussion

The current study looks into the students' perceptions from four different aspects, target language competence, EFL teachers' educational skills and awareness, EFL teachers' communicative skills and methods, and EFL teachers' social and emotional skills. The results show a common belief in the importance of the role of the EFL teacher and the unique characteristics of EFL teachers in particular.

### 5.1 Language Proficiency

As for the first category, namely EFL teachers' competence in the target language, our study's results find a general perception of the students in the vitality of teachers' high competence in English as a crucial element in making a good EFL teacher. This finding is based on the fact that most of the students found teaching English to be more difficult than teaching any other subject, due to the requirement of high proficiency in the target language, providing that both teachers and learners are working in a non-native language environment. The finding seems to be in line with previous studies on the same issue as pointed by Barnes (2013) who looked into the perceptions of Korean university students of effective foreign language teachers, whereby the results indicated 'Knowledge of English' to be the second most important attribute after "Delivery".

Some similar results were also obtained by another study on Iranian university students majoring in English language, whose results stated “reading and speaking proficiency” as one of the most favourable English teachers’ characteristics (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). When considering the fact that the majority of the students in our sample believed that mastering any language, compared to mastering any other subject, is time consuming, the students tend to perceive teaching English to be specifically a difficult job. Such belief tends to get even more intense within the students of lower GPA and younger age. The finding might be indicative of the overwhelming fear in the future English teachers of teaching as a result of their low abilities in the target language. Such fear, however, tends to fade away with higher proficiency levels, if GPA presumably reflects better language abilities.

The analysis of the first category as a whole showed high agreement between participants in general. No significance was found when the mean of the first category (proficiency in target language) was obtained, and interacted with independent variables of age, GPA, social status and academic year of study. This finding agrees with many researchers, such as Richardson (2011), who revealed that the perceptions of 19 Japanese university teachers and 341 university students showed huge differences, yet they agreed that effective language teachers should have a native-like control of grammar and accent and spend time in teaching culture.

### *5.2 Educational Awareness*

With regards to the second category, EFL teachers’ educational skills and awareness, the study shows the importance of the EFL teachers’ role in encouraging their students’ involvement in the learning process. Older students, however, tend to dismiss the efficiency of that role in learning. Seniority, GPA and marital status have also played a role in that regard.

This finding is very similar to previous studies as pointed out by Lee (2012), whose study on Japanese first year college students revealed ‘encouraging speaking’ alongside some other attributes. Teachers’ assistance to their students in gaining skills relative to their lives seems to be crucial for Kuwaiti students in particular. The students’ GPA and marital status have also interactively affected the students’ responses in this issue.

Flexibility of the teacher has been perceived as being vital for EFL teachers only. Thorough planning of lessons, and the use of progressive teaching techniques have also been suggested to be important in raising EFL teachers’ proficiency. The study also indicates a general agreement on the importance of implementing such activities.

With the exception of senior and married students, the majority of our sample has agreed on the importance of knowing students’ strengths and weaknesses. The study’s findings ascertain the uniqueness of educational skills of EFL teachers when compared to teachers of other subjects.

Hence, the second set of questions (educational and instructional awareness) has found a general sense of agreement between participants. Significance was not found when conducting a multi-ANOVA by age, GPA, social status and year in CBE. This finding goes hand in hand with many studies conducted on EFL teaching qualities and the use of different teaching techniques. A good example is Brosh (1996), who investigated the characteristics of effective FL teachers among 200 FL teachers of English, French, Arabic and Hebrew and 406 9<sup>th</sup> grade high school students to find that both teachers and students believed that subject matter knowledge was important followed by the ability to transmit knowledge in a simple way. Barnes (2013) has also shown that “delivery” is the most important attribute followed by “knowledge of English” then “rapport”, “organization”, “preparation” and “fairness” (see also Barnes, 2010).

### *5.3 Organisation and Communication*

The third set of statements investigated the participants’ perception of EFL teachers’ class organization and communication skills. Emphasis on the learners’ encouragement to speak and use the target language in class is perceived to be very important in reaching the ultimate goal of the teaching process.

The need to encourage the learners’ communicative skills tends to be strongly disputed by the students in our sample. As the statistical test results indicate, such dispute tends to be affected by a number of factors including age, seniority, GPA, Marital status and an interactional affect between them. Yet, there seems to be a common belief of the necessity of involving more than the usual four skills in the teaching process. Though, the older students seem to disagree.

The study has also revealed the risk of projecting learners’ mistakes as perceived by our students; such worry tends to be minimized by senior students. On the other hand, teaching grammar is perceived by the majority of our sample, yet at a stronger extent amongst first and second year students, to be a crucial element in maximizing the rate of success in EFL teaching-learning environment. A possible reason could be the grammatical problems the participants themselves have been encountering in learning English throughout their years of studying the

language. Our finding in this regard tends to be parallel to a number of previous studies, whereby teaching grammar has always been perceived as being an important feature of a proficient EFL teacher (Lee, 2012; Arikan, 2008).

#### *5.4 Social and Emotional*

The final set of statements focuses on the significance of EFL teachers' social and emotional skills. In this regard, the participants in our sample find a close teacher-student relationship to be crucial in reaching more successful teaching results, yet those who were divorced or widowed tend to find that unimportant, may be as a result of how the community perceives women of those statuses in particular to meet the obligation of being socially isolated. Similar findings have also been obtained by Saafin (1999), whose study investigated Arab students at University of Sharjah, in which he claims "interpersonal rapport with students" such as "respecting and giving advice", "being friendly", "fair", "caring", and "patient" as important attributes of proficient English teachers. Likewise, Witcher (2003) concludes that "a good relationship with students is a vital factor in an effective English teacher", with "enthusiasm" as one of the most important feature of all. Moreover, Mahboob (2004) has reported teachers' emotional support as a trait that distinguishes a native language teacher from a non-native language one, with the latter being more effective as a result of being more emotionally supportive.

It seems that the fourth category (social and emotional skills) is the most favoured among students, and highly important to them. Similar results were found in Chen and Lin's (2009) survey of 198 junior high school Taiwanese students and found all three categories of instructional competence, personality and teacher-student relationship important to students. Surprisingly, students emphasized "personality traits" such as, "being friendly", "open-minded", "confident", and "humorous" as well as "teacher student relationship" which include "respecting students", "caring", "understanding students' needs", "asking questions" and "encouraging students to ask questions" more than "instructional competence". Furthermore, in another study, Chen (2012) showed students favouring "personal qualities" as most important like "teachers' sense of humour", "kindness", "friendliness" and "understanding students".

The general perception of the significance of close teacher-student relationship could be due to a common belief amongst the participants that the use of English tends in itself to create a linguistic barrier between EFL teachers and their students, let alone the fact that teaching English may itself upgrade the teachers' social ranking within the community. Similarly, a survey of 200 university students majoring in English language and literature in Iran by Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011) reported "reading and speaking proficiency", "arousing student interest", "building self-confidence" and "motivation" as the most favourable characteristics for EFL teachers. Building a positive teacher-student relationship might overcome the strong linguistic and social status barriers established naturally as a result of teaching a new language within a non-native environment. As a result, a general belief of the necessity of developing the EFL learners' motivation and positive attitudes within an EFL context seems to be adopted by the majority of our participants as indicated in the results of our current study. The finding might indicate the uniqueness of the students' perceptions of EFL teachers from a social and emotional aspect.

#### *5.5 Socio-Academic Factors*

An exploration of the socio-academic factors affecting the samples' responses in this regard has shown some discrepancy between previous studies and the current one. While previous studies have not shown emphasis amongst their participants' socio-academic factors, our sample's responses tend to be mainly affected by the participants' marital status and GPA, a finding that may suggest the uniqueness of the Kuwaiti community on this social trait.

Significant differences were found between high and low achieving students, where high achieving students reported "English proficiency" as the most important trait while for "socio-affective skills" a higher mean was recorded for low achieving students. As for teacher characteristics such as "language proficiency", high achieving students reported a higher mean than low achieving students. As for the socio-affective factors, "having a sense of humour" was ranked high by low achieving students while "being helpful to students" was ranked high-by-high achieving students. Marital status showed significance in the category of socio-academic factors, which in part reflects the uniqueness of the Kuwaiti community on this social trait.

All in all, the current study accentuates the uniqueness of EFL teachers' characteristics across the four-targeted aspects: language competence, educational and instructional awareness, teaching methods and communicative skills, and social and emotional skills.

## **6. Conclusion**

Since students' perceptions have an impact on their learning (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011), knowing students'

perceptions as to what constitutes a good teacher will help teachers to rethink the techniques and methods they use to cater for students' different styles.

After reviewing many studies that aimed to analyse students' and teachers' perceptions of the qualities of effective English language teachers (Park & Lee, 2006; Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2009; Richardson, 2011 among others), and analysing the data obtained in this study, it was found that this study has shown similar results in the Kuwaiti academic environment to the international perception of the common role of an EFL teacher.

Results in this paper have shown high agreement with the literature concerned with the qualities of EFL teachers. However, some variables were worth noticing, such as students' achievement level. Significant differences were found between high and low achieving students, where high achieving students reported 'English proficiency' as the most important trait while for 'socio-affective skills' a higher mean was recorded for low achieving students. Marital status and GPA showed significance in the category of socio-academic factors, which in part reflects the uniqueness of the Kuwaiti community on this social trait.

Although a general agreement on language proficiency, educational awareness, teaching and communicative skills, and social and emotional skills was extremely high, the researchers noticed that the more years in CBE, the less unique an EFL teacher seemed, and the less was required in their view point. In addition, younger participants seemed to view EFL teachers as being sophisticated knowledge-wise, yet very friendly and emotional.

In the exploration of the effect of grade level, social status, age and students' GPA on students' perceptions of effective EFL teachers, the researchers found that undergraduate college students mostly agree that an EFL teacher should have unique traits. These traits might make their job more difficult than other teachers, however it also allows a better space for creativity and student teacher interaction.

A few limitations have been noticed in this study. The College of Basic Education does not cater for Male students in the English major, therefore, the perspective is solely from female participants' point of view. Gender in education has usually shown to be an effective independent factor, which unfortunately had to be left out in this study. Another limitation is the absence of the teachers' perspective, and might be a case to consider in future research.

Nonetheless, with these limitations, the researchers find this study to be a decent contribution to EFL teaching, especially in Kuwait. It enables the understanding of what students expect from their EFL teachers, and what they believe they should be able to do when they graduate. In turn, EFL teachers might try to improve certain skills to meet expectations, or clarify the uniqueness of their job when needed. This study has shown that Kuwaiti students generally believe that an EFL teacher's job is not an easy one; it is very challenging compared to teaching other subjects. However, this challenge only adds to the exceptionality of EFL teachers.

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### Appendix

#### Questionnaire:

This study investigates Kuwaiti English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' perceptions of some of the unique characteristics of EFL teachers that distinguish them from teachers of other subjects. By doing this, language teacher education can gain a better understanding of how EFL teachers are conceptualized and, more important, provide a more nuanced explanation of the uniqueness of EFL teachers and teaching that may be meaningful and relevant to teachers and students situated within particular socio-educational contexts.

Thank you for your participation

- Age group:     16-20         21-30         31-40         +41
- Years in CBE:  1<sup>st</sup> year     2<sup>nd</sup> year     3<sup>rd</sup> year     4<sup>th</sup> year     more than 4 years
- GPA:          1.00-1.99     2.00-2.32     2.33-2.99     3.00-3.66     3.67-4.00
- Social status:  married         divorced/widowed         bachelorette
- Nationality:     Kuwaiti         Non-Kuwaiti

Answer the questions below by ticking where 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (partly agree/disagree), 2 (disagree), and 1 (strongly disagree). Do not choose any answer if you DON'T KNOW.

EFL Teachers English proficiency:		1	2	3	4	5
1	EFL teachers have a more difficult job because they have to explain things to learners in English.					
2	Teaching EFL is difficult because teachers and learners work in a nonnative language.					
3	Teaching EFL is difficult because mastering English takes a long time.					
4	Teaching EFL is difficult because non-native English teachers' abilities are compared to that of native speakers.					
EFL Teachers' Educational Awareness						
5	EFL teachers encourage more student involvement.					
6	EFL teachers tolerate more of learners' mistakes.					
7	EFL teachers help learners gain skills, which have more practical relevance to real life.					
8	EFL teachers are more flexible.					
9	EFL teachers spend more time preparing for lessons.					
10	EFL teachers use more progressive teaching methodologies.					
11	EFL teachers teach learners to use learning strategies and skills more.					

- 
- 12 EFL teachers encourage learners to express their needs and preferences for learning more.
  - 13 EFL teachers use more authentic activities.
  - 14 EFL teachers are better trained.
  - 15 EFL teachers know and understand learners' strengths and weaknesses more.
  - 16 EFL teachers manage class time more properly.
  - 17 Teaching EFL involves teaching the cultures of English speaking countries.
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EFL Teachers Organization and Communication Skills:

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- 18 EFL teachers encourage more speaking in class.
  - 19 Teaching EFL involves developing learners' communication skills.
  - 20 Teaching EFL involves more than teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing.
  - 21 Teaching EFL means correcting every mistake learners make.
  - 22 EFL teachers should be selective in projecting some of their students' mistakes over the others.
  - 23 Teaching EFL would have a more successful outcome if teachers focus on general communicative skills.
  - 24 EFL teachers should focus on teaching grammar as it is the core of any language.
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EFL Teachers' Social and Emotional Skills:

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- 25 EFL teachers have a closer relationship with their students.
  - 26 EFL teachers' use of English creates a barrier between teachers and students.
  - 27 EFL teachers have higher status than teachers of other subjects.
  - 28 EFL teachers are more motivating.
- 

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