



## Characteristics of an Effective English Language Teacher as Perceived by Iranian Teachers and Learners of English

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### Abstract

This study attempted to characterize qualities of an effective English language teacher (EELT) as perceived by Iranian English language teachers and learners. For this purpose, a tailor-made questionnaire was administered to 59 English language teachers and 215 learners of English at universities, high schools and language institutes in Iran. The results indicated significant differences between teachers' and learners' views on some characteristics of EELTs. Teachers seemed to agree more strongly than students that an EELT should assign homework and integrate group activities into the classroom. Other areas of significant difference in opinions included preparing the lesson well, using lesson plans and assessing what students have learned reasonably. Students, on the contrary, agreed more than teachers that teaching English in Persian (first language of the learners) was one of the prominent characteristics of an EELT. The qualitative analysis indicated that teachers perceived the features like mastery of the target language, good knowledge of pedagogy and the use of particular techniques and methods as well as a good personality to make an EELT, whereas, learners gave more weight to characteristics relating to a teacher's personality and the way he behaves toward his students.

**Keywords:** Teacher characteristics, Effective teacher, English language teacher; English language learner

### 1. Introduction

Good and qualified teachers are essential for efficient functioning of educational systems and for enhancing the quality of learning. Research supports this notion that a good teacher and actions to be taken on his part in the classroom play a vital role in provoking effective and efficient learning on the part of the students (Markley, 2004). Teachers also have a fundamental role in their learners' academic achievement and their quality can highly influence student outcomes (Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijse & Robinson, 2004; Lasley II, Siedentop & Yinger, 2006; Rockoff, 2004).

English language teachers are by no means an exception and their key role in effective language learning cannot be overlooked. Special attention must be paid to this link between teachers and learners in countries like Iran where language learning happens mainly in formal classroom settings (Kariminia & Salehizadeh, 2007), and teachers, as the main source of language input to students, affect their learning directly.

Although effective teachers in general may share some characteristics, there are certain qualities that differ among them depending on the subject matter they teach. Some researchers believe that it is the nature of the subject matter that makes language teachers different from teachers of other fields (Hammadou & Bernhar, 1987). Some others even go beyond this and claim that diverse subject matters are not the only distinction between teachers of various subjects (Borg, 2006). Rather a teacher's beliefs, perceptions and assumptions about teaching and teacher efficacy affect the way he/she understands and organizes instruction (Chacón, 2005). It is also important to study the perceptions of learners about learning and teaching. Their beliefs about language learning seem to have obvious relevance to understanding their expectations of the course, their commitment to the class as well as providing them with the opportunity to be successful and satisfied with their language learning program (Horwitz, 1988). Moreover, investigation of the student beliefs about different behaviors in the language classroom is useful in informing teachers about different types of learners that need to be catered for (Cotterall, 1999).

According to Noora (2008), the culture of teaching in Iran is primarily teacher-centered; and accordingly, there are limited opportunities for learners to have their say about their expectations of a good and effective teacher. Studying characteristics of an effective English language teacher from the learners' point of view in such a context is worthwhile in that it is in fact a kind of needs analysis intended to help teachers improve the quality of their teaching in an attempt to meet their students' needs. To the best knowledge of the authors, no previous study has been conducted on the characteristics of an effective English language teacher in Iran neither from the perspective of teachers nor from that of learners. It was therefore the aim of this study to investigate the characteristics of an EELT as perceived by Iranian teachers and learners of English in order to find out if there are any differences between the perspectives they have on

the issue in question. While this study is genuinely exploratory in the Iranian context, it is expected to contribute to our better understanding of the issue by confirming or rejecting findings of other researchers in other parts of the world.

### *1.1. General characteristics of an effective teacher*

What makes a teacher effective has been a subject of prime importance to many scholars concerned with education. In 1957, secondary-school principals in New York were asked to nominate effective teachers of academic subjects. The most frequently mentioned qualities were: subject-matter mastery, motivation, dedication, co-operation, sense of humour, creativity, efficiency, control, discipline, standards, promptness with reports, methods and generosity with personal time for students (Calabria, 1960). Effectiveness in teaching was reported to be directly related to mastery of subject matter in the selected teaching field. In addition, a long apprenticeship of teaching in one's academic field was thought to be a necessary pre-requisite for effectiveness.

Feldman (1976) analyzed seventy two studies on characteristics reported by college students as associated with ideal teachers and as important for effective teaching. Across this large body of research, he found the following characteristics to be consistently associated with superior college teachers or teaching: stimulating interest of the learners; being clear and understandable; being knowledgeable in subject matter; being prepared and organized for the course and being enthusiastic about the subject matter and teaching. Friendliness, helpfulness, and openness to others' opinions were traits that students said they preferred in teachers especially when they freely described their ideal or best teacher.

In a later study, Feldman (1988) reviewed thirty one other studies in each of which students and faculty had specified the instructional characteristics they considered particularly important to good teaching and effective instruction. Students placed more importance than faculty on teachers being interesting, having good elocutionary skills, and being available and helpful. They also emphasized the outcomes of instruction more than faculty did. Faculty placed more importance than did students on teachers being intellectually challenging, motivating students and setting high standards for them, and encouraging self-initiated learning.

### *1.2. Characteristics of an effective language teacher*

Some clues can be gleaned from previous research about the qualities of a good and effective language teacher. Pettis (1997) identified three main characteristics for a professionally competent teacher. According to her, an effective teacher must firstly be principled and knowledgeable in addition to being skillful. Secondly, professional needs and interests of an effective language teacher must change over time and develop during his/her teaching. Thirdly, a teacher must be personally committed to his/her professional development.

In an attempt to understand what it means to be a foreign language teacher and in what sense they are different from other teachers, Borg (2006) examined the definitions of over 200 practicing and prospective English language teachers from a variety of contexts about the distinction between language teachers and those of other fields. His analysis also included the opinions of mathematics, history, science and chemistry teachers on the extent to which characteristics claimed to be distinctive of language teachers applied to their own subjects. His participants believed that subject matter and the medium were the same in language teaching and that there was no clear distinction between them as in other subjects. Moreover, language teachers inducted learners into ways of thinking and being which reflect those of the target culture. In terms of content, language teaching was regarded to be more complex and varied than other subjects. In terms of methodology, in the afore-mentioned study, the methods, the activities and the material used by or available to English language teachers were reported to be different from those in the other subjects. It was also found that English language teaching methodology was more progressive than that of other subjects, and consequently, English language teachers needed to be more up-to-date to cope with advanced and progressive nature of language teaching methodology. English language teachers were also supposed to have closer, more relaxed, and generally more positive relationships with learners in comparison to other teachers. One further source of distinction between English language teachers and teachers of other fields was that the former's language proficiency and command of the language was usually compared to that of native speakers of the target language (Borg, 2006). However, it is not clearly stated if this final point is a merit or a demerit for language teachers.

Effective language teachers have been described in the literature as having not only a profound competence in the target language but a set of personal qualities like sensitivity, warmth and tolerance (Vadillio, 1999). In an investigation of the characteristics of good language teachers, Brosh (1996) found the desirable characteristics of an effective language teacher to be: having knowledge and command of the target language; being able to organize, explain, and clarify, as well as to arouse and sustain interest and motivation among students; being fair to students by showing neither favoritism nor prejudice; and being available to students. Both language teachers and learners counted command of the target language and teaching comprehensibility as the most important characteristics to be possessed by an effective foreign language teacher. Moreover, the teachers gave more weight to items related to developing motivation and research orientation, whereas the students counted items relating to treating students fairly and making lessons interesting more important as compared with the teachers' ideas on these very issues.

Research has recently been conducted on the development of standards in Foreign Language Teacher Preparation in Croatia (Kalebic, 2005). As a result, possession of fourteen competences was reported to be needed by would-be language teachers. Those characteristics reported to be highly valuable for a beginning language teacher were: linguistic and communicative competence; communication and presentation skills; ability to motivate learners for learning; ability to choose appropriate teaching strategies; ability to deal with unpredictable situations and to maintain discipline; ability to plan the lesson; ability to organize learning activities; ability of pedagogical action; ability to create friendly atmosphere in the classroom; ability to respond to learner abilities and needs (flexibility); knowledge about teaching strategies; knowledge about the culture and literature in of the target language; ability to assess learner language knowledge/competence; and knowledge of methods and theoretical concepts in English language teaching (Kalebic, 2005).

And finally, Park and Lee (2006) investigated the characteristics of effective English teachers as perceived by teachers and students in high schools in Korea, with a self-report questionnaire consisting of three categories: English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills. Their findings indicated that on the whole the teacher's perceptions of characteristics important for an English language teacher to possess differed significantly from those of the students in all three categories, with the teachers ranking English proficiency the highest and the students ranking pedagogical knowledge the first.

Although most of the research conducted on the qualities of a good teacher (a small sample of which was reported above) has mainly focused on teachers' perceptions only and although there has been little work of comparative nature where the views of both teachers and learners have been compared, knowing about what other stake-holders (including learners, parents and authorities) expect from teachers will greatly contribute to effective fulfillment of teachers' duties. No doubt, learners are the most important individuals for teachers to cater for (since without learners, there will be no teachers), and understanding their expectations as who a good teacher is will of course help teachers to rethink the techniques they use for teaching, especially if learners' views show teachers that each learner is a unique person with his/her unique likes, dislikes, preferences and learning styles. As such, the ideas and opinions of learners will help teachers to better live up to the expectations of the most important stake-holders in a teaching-learning process (Sadeghi and Babai, 2009). This paper, accordingly, furthers our understanding of the teacher-student relationships by investigating characteristics of an effective English language teacher from the perspective of both teachers and learners.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants*

Participants of this study who were selected as a convenience sample were divided into two main groups of English language teachers and learners and each group consisted of three subgroups. The teachers group consisted of 11 university professors teaching English Language and Literature and English Language Teaching at different Iranian universities, 18 High school English teachers and 30 teachers of English working at language institutes.

The learners group was also combination of 99 university students majoring in English Language and literature, 89 pre-university students and 27 English learners from language institutes.

English was the foreign language for all the participants. The major characteristics of the participants are illustrated in the Table 1.

### *2.2 Instrument*

A paper and pencil questionnaire comprising two sections (44 items based on Likert Scale and 6 open-ended questions) was developed by the authors after a thorough review of the literature about qualities of an EELT. The questionnaire was developed in English and Persian and both versions were revised 4 times with the help of colleagues and peers before being used in a pilot study to investigate how different items functioned and to find out whether there was a need to revise, add or drop any items. With comments received after pilot testing, two items were added to each section. The final version of the questionnaire which was administered along with a covering letter was made up of two sections. The first part of the questionnaire included 46 statements about the characteristics of an EELT (the internal consistency index of which was calculated to be 0.94 using Cronbach's Alpha), and the participants were asked to express their agreement or disagreement based on a five-point (strongly disagree, disagree, no idea, agree, strongly agree) Likert Scale. They were asked to select the choice which best represented their reaction to the statement. The second part consisted of 8 open-ended questions to be answered by the participants. The questionnaire appears in full in the appendix.

### *2.3 Data collection and procedure*

The authors contacted English language professors/teachers teaching at Urmia University, two high schools in Adjabshir (a city in East Azarbayjan province, Iran) and three language institutes namely Iran Language Institute (ILI), Jihad Daneshgahi and Shokouh Language Institute in Urmia and administered the questionnaire to each of them in person. The questionnaire was also sent by email to 550 other teachers including all academic members of English language

departments of University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University, Tarbiyat Modares University, University of Shiraz, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, University of Semnan, University of Kashan, University of Sistan and Baloochestan, University of Yazd, University of Arak, University of Shahrekord, University of Isfahan, University of Ilam, Razi University of Kermanshah and a Yahoo Group named "Creative English Teachers", which has about 400 members who are all English language teachers working in language institutes. Out of a total of 800 questionnaires distributed among English language teachers and learners, only 274 questionnaires (34.25 %) were returned.

The questionnaire was also given to all freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior and MA students majoring in English Language and Literature or TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) at English language department of University of Urmia, all Pre-university students in Razi and Fazilat high schools of Adjabshir and a cohort of learners at ILL, Shokouh and JD language institutes of Urmia.

The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the spring semester of academic year 2008-2009 and it took about 20 minutes to complete. All the teachers and the university students were given the English version of the questionnaire. The learners studying English in language institutes were provided with both English and Persian versions of the questionnaire and they were given the option to answer the one they preferred. The high school students were provided with the Persian version of the questionnaire due to their lower English Language proficiency level. Even in the English version of the questionnaire, the participants were allowed to answer the open-ended questions in Persian if they so desired.

## 2.4 Data analysis

### 2.4.1 Likert Scale items

To begin the analysis, the responses agreeing or disagreeing strongly with *all items* were excluded. Then, the following values were assigned to responses provided for Likert Scale items: Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, No Idea = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. Then the mean values and standard deviations for each item were calculated using the MatLab statistical package. To compare the differences between students and teachers in their views on the characteristics of an EELT, the statistical analysis technique of Wilcoxon's rank-sum was applied (Dickinson Gibbons & Chakraborti, 2003; Mackey & Gass, 2005) using the Statistical Toolbox of MatLab.

### 2.4.2 Open-ended questions

The responses to open-ended questions were analyzed mainly qualitatively. This involved a process of tabulating, coding and categorizing the written responses. First of all, responses to each question were transferred to a separate grid. Then the responses were analyzed through open technique of analysis and they were read carefully to identify reoccurring themes and concepts and to code them subsequently. These themes were then sorted into broader categories as the next section shows.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Quantitative results

Following the application of Wilcoxon's rank-sum test, *P*-values for each item were calculated, and it was noted that the responses of teachers and learners were significantly different on eight items out of a total 46 regarding the characteristics of an EELT. The significant differences were marked at two levels, i.e.  $P < 0.05$  and  $P < 0.005$ . Table 2 illustrates the items which showed statistically significant differences between the views of teachers and those of learners on the criteria used for judging the quality of an English teacher.

Responses of the teachers and the learners were significantly different at  $P < 0.005$  level of significance to items 13, 14 and 21. In other words, the teachers agreed more strongly than learners that an effective English language teacher should assign homework and integrate group activities to class (items 13 and 14). However, students agreed more strongly than teachers that teaching English in Persian (students' native language) is a characteristic of an effective English language teacher (item 21). Other areas of difference at  $P < 0.05$  level of significance were shown by items asking about lesson preparation, being up to date, using lesson plans, assessing what students have learned reasonably and being neat and tidy in appearance (items 9, 15, 17, 22, 35 respectively). In all of these items, teachers agreed more strongly (with the difference being statistically significant) than students on the relevant item serving as a yardstick for judging teacher-effectiveness. These differences between the perspectives of the teachers and those of the learners are better illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, which include information about the mean values and corresponding error bars for Standard Deviations of responses provided by each group of subjects. Items marked with one asterisk at the top of the bar are those which show a significant difference between the views of teachers and students at  $P < 0.05$  level of significance. Those items which show a higher statistically significant difference between teachers' and students' opinions on qualities of a good English teacher (at  $P < 0.005$  level of significance) are marked with two asterisks at the top of the relevant bar.

### 3.2 Qualitative results

Open-ended items were mainly meant to gather data on characteristics of an effective English language teacher other than those included in the Likert Scale items and also on qualities which were barely addressed in the literature. The items eliciting qualitative information were in fact intended to produce further complementary ideas adding to the opinions surveyed quantitatively rather than to substitute or to triangulate quantitative data. Except for questions number 1 and 2, the other questions were designed to elicit opinions of the participants in relation to particular aspects that may affect an English teacher's efficacy like the teacher's or the learners' gender, the teacher's age, fame or origin. The first question was aimed to determine the characteristics of an effective English language teacher other than those mentioned in the Likert Scale questions. The second question asked them about the possible differences between English language teachers and teachers of other subject areas. Answers to each question were analyzed independently, and the most important issues emerging from the responses are discussed in the course of the following paragraphs.

Both the teachers and learners regarded the following as desirable characteristics of an effective English language teacher apart from those cited above in the quantitative part: being patient and flexible, caring about the students' needs, having positive attitudes towards the learners and being smart and creative. However, the students mentioned a point which was completely ignored by the teachers and which may be not so welcome for teachers. According to the learners, besides the characteristics mentioned above, being to the point and not speaking a lot about one's personal experiences was a characteristic of an effective teacher. As an answer to this question, one of students wrote, "*Effective English language teachers must be open minded and use a variety of methods in teaching without sticking to a particular method. They must also have a positive view toward their students.*" And a teacher, as an example, commented, "*He should be optimistic. He should also welcome student's mistakes and try to put himself in his students' shoes.*"

Regarding the differences between English language teachers and those of other subject matters, both groups counted being familiar with a foreign language and culture and teaching in a medium other than students' mother tongue as the most important distinctive feature between English language teachers and those of other subject areas. One of the teachers argued along the following lines, for instance: "*English language teachers differ from teachers of other subjects in that they teach a language other than the learners' mother tongue and are therefore familiar with a foreign culture. They are the only source of that language available to their students.*" Although the teachers regarded being up-to-date as a favorable characteristic of an effective English language teacher, they did not consider it exclusive to English language teachers. In other words, they perceived being up-to-date as a factor affecting a teacher's efficacy but not as being a distinctive characteristic of English language teachers. However, the students believed that English language teachers were distinct from the teachers of other subjects because the former group were more up-to-date.

On the whole, it seems that both groups equally perceived gender as a neutral factor in the efficacy of a teacher, and that the majority of teachers and students reported that a teacher's or the learners' gender did not affect a teacher's efficacy. However, the participants' own gender seems to have affected their answers to two questions about the learners' and the teachers' gender and its effect on a teachers' efficacy. Interestingly, the majority of male participants from both groups admitted that female teachers were more effective. Similarly, the majority of the females believed that male teachers were more effective and described male teachers as being stricter and having better control of the class. Male respondents regarded characteristics such as being flexible and kind, being more attentive in the class and paying attention to even minor errors of the students, being more friendly and having a good rapport with their students as positive characteristics of female English language teachers that caused them to be more effective than males. A male participant, for example, commented, "*Female teachers are more kind and flexible towards students and because of these characteristics they create a more friendly and non-threatening atmosphere in their classes.*" A female participant's counter-idea was put in this way: "*Male teachers are more effective since they could control the class better than female ones and they are more skillful in conveying their knowledge to their students.*"

While the learners gave more weight to personality of a teacher and the way he behaves his students, the teachers believed that besides personality factors, a good knowledge of the language and pedagogy characterize an effective English language teacher.

In terms of a teacher's age, although both groups indicated some characteristics like being more up-to-date and energetic for young teachers and being more experienced for old teachers as the points of contrast between young and old teachers that may affect their performance, both groups admitted that factors like motivation and being interested in teaching are more important in a teacher's efficacy, and that age is not so much a crucial factor in this regard as one of the learners expressed, "*Because young teachers are more ambitious they tend to shine better and be more effective*" and as one of the teachers acknowledged, "*Young teachers understand their students better but they are weak in managing the class.*"

While the students regarded the fame of a teacher as a factor affecting a teacher's efficacy negatively, the teachers believed that fame causes the teachers to feel more responsibility about their students and to try to improve their performance and efficacy.

Generally, both the teachers and students counted the origin of an English teacher (i.e. where he comes from) as not having much effect on a teacher's efficacy. Some of the teachers also mentioned some factors like better payments and more educational facilities in bigger cities that may cause English language teachers to be more effective than those teaching in other cities.

#### 4. Discussion

As the above findings show teachers and learners of English hold different views toward some characteristics of an effective English language teacher. As Pettis (1997) notes, professionally competent English teachers are profoundly knowledgeable in language, and in line with the findings of Park and Lee (2006), Brosh (1996), and Kalabic (2005) most of the teachers in this investigation perceived knowledge of language to be a crucial factor in characterizing an effective English language teacher. This also confirms the findings of Calabria (1960), Feldman (1976) and Feldman (1988) who had founded mastery of subject matter as a characteristic of an effective teacher. On the whole, the teachers perceived features like high knowledge of pedagogy and the use of particular techniques and methods such as preparing the lesson well, using lesson plans, unbiased assessment of what students have learned, integrating group activities to class and assigning homework to be possessed by effective English language teachers. However, the learners assigned more weight to characteristics relating to a teachers' personality and the way he behaves his students. Moreover, whereas the teachers only concentrated on the positive characteristics of an effective teacher, such as being patient, being flexible and caring about students' needs, being optimist and having positive attitude toward the students, and being smart and creative, the students – considering these positive qualities important – focused also on the characteristics that may affect a teacher's efficacy adversely like speaking a lot about his/her personal experiences. All these observations indicate that teachers look at an effective teacher from the professional point of view and their responses are more informed reflecting their knowledge and expertise on theories and methodology of language teaching. The students' perspectives also seem very realistic and the fact that they consider both strong and weak points of their teachers can help teachers to reflect on their own behaviors in the classroom and try to overcome the possible problems resulting in deficiency.

Similar to findings of Brosh (1996), one of the most striking points in the learners' responses was their emphasis on an effective teacher's personality traits. As one of them wrote:

*“Being of good character and behaving the students in a friendly manner is very important for a teacher to be effective. This provides the learners with a non-threatening environment for learning and makes them think positively about the teacher and the subject matter taught by him/her. Therefore, they learn as efficiently as possible.”*

The responses of the learners were replete with ideas of this kind showing that many of them associate subject matter with the personality of the teacher, and that the teacher's positive and favorable personality psychologically influences the learners' effective learning. It could even cause the students to decide to choose a particular field of study, as one of the university students argued:

*“A teacher's personality is very important and could influence their efficacy a lot. When I was in high school I had an English teacher who was very knowledgeable as well as kind and caring about her students. She was loved by her students and everybody was learning her lessons well. She had such a good personality that I always wished to be a teacher like her. So, I made her a role model for myself and came to university to study English.”*

Teachers must be aware how momentous their responsibility is and try to give a positive and favorable impression to their students to reach the best result.

The other significant area of differences between the views of the teachers and the learners was about the medium of teaching English. The observation that most learners expected an effective English language teacher to teach English in their mother tongue indicates their possible weakness in communicating via the target language. Although further research is needed in order to explore the reasons for this finding, some pertinent issues will be discussed in the course of the following lines.

In the world of language teaching and learning, and especially after the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), there appears to be a general consensus on the maximal use of target language in the language classes, and the desirability of target language as the medium of teaching is emphasized (Crawford, 2004). Apart from the use of target language in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, the appropriate level of difficulty for students should also be considered (Polio & Duff, 1994). Motivated by the principles dictated by CLT, the teachers surveyed here thought that an effective English language teacher should teach English in English. However, the students felt that teaching English via Persian (or in the learners' mother tongue) is a characteristic of an effective English language teacher. Iranian EFL learners find it difficult to communicate freely in the target language and this is one of the major problems they have in communication (Kariminia & Salehizadeh, 2007). Kariminia and Salehizadeh attribute this weakness of Iranian EFL learners to school and English language departments curricula, teaching methodology, lack of target language environment and the learners' motivation. In a similar vein Razmjoo (2007) counts lack of attention to

communicative language teaching features in high school textbooks as a pitfall and claims that Iranian high school English textbooks do not fit EFL communicative teaching and do not fulfill language learners needs. This trend usually continues in most universities in Iran where the curriculum for general English is mainly grammar and vocabulary based and less attention is paid to communicative skills. Moreover, lack of audio-visual and multimedia facilities go hand in hand with other factors mentioned above to cause many problems for learners in developing good communicative skills. The other issue that should be touched here is the level of target language used in the classroom. Besides students' weaknesses, the teachers' lack of attention to gearing the target language to the appropriate level of the learners might be one further reason for such preference on the part of the learners, i.e. the desire to receive instruction in L1.

Both the teachers and the learners indicated that the most important factor to distinguish English language teachers was their familiarity with a foreign language and culture. They also admitted that English language teachers differed from the teachers of other fields in exploiting different teaching methods. Unlike the findings of Borg (2006), the participants were not concerned about unanimity of subject and the medium but, both the teachers and the learners believed that teaching a language other than students' mother tongue is very special about the language teachers and distinguishes them from the other teachers. However, only the learners felt that English language teachers should have closer and more positive relationship with their students and should also be open to a variety of thoughts, suggestions and criticisms. This finding again confirms those of Feldman (1976), where he found that students perceived superior college teacher to be more friendly, helpful and open to other's opinions.

The other issue to be considered relates to the gender of an effective English language teacher. In this relation, Feldman (1992) reviewed a number of laboratory and experimental research on college students' preconceptions of male and female college teachers. He noticed that in the majority of studies, students' global evaluations of male and female college teachers as professionals were not different. A year later he published the second part of his review stating that when statistically significant differences were found across studies, more of them favored women over men (Feldman, 1993). However, he found an average association between gender of the students and overall evaluation, while favoring females was too trivial in size to be significant in practical terms. Our findings partly confirm his review. From the learners' and the teachers' point of view (without considering their gender), neither male nor female teachers were perceived to be more effective than the other, and gender of a teacher was regarded as a factor having little or almost no effect on his/her efficacy. However, regardless of being a teacher or a learner, more males than females perceived female English language teachers as more effective and reversely more females than males acknowledged male English teachers to be more effective. This finding which differs from what Feldman found in the second part of his review, needs more in-depth investigation and it might also be analyzed from a psychological point of view.

## **5. Conclusion**

The discussion in the preceding section leads us to the conclusion that teachers and learners of EFL may have overlapping and at times divergent perceptions on desirable qualities of a good language teacher. To make their teaching activities more effective for learners, caring and responsible language teachers should therefore feel a need for discovering what their peers believe to be favorable features of their career as well as what their customers' needs are. As such, the findings discussed above have far-reaching implications primarily for language teachers as well as for authorities in different educational settings, particularly in an Iranian context.

Regarding the emphasis of the teachers on target language knowledge, teacher education programs should invest more than what they previously did on improving teachers' English proficiency if they would like to contribute to the process of training effective teachers. As teachers are the main source of language available to students, their richer knowledge of and better proficiency in the language can help learners to overcome their difficulties in communicative skills too. Moreover, attending to students' needs will not only mean that teachers should seek to meet the learners' needs with regards to personality (whereby more attention must be paid to educational psychology), it will also mean that teachers will need to offer individualized instruction as far as possible in an attempt to cater for idiosyncratic learning styles of different learners. This latter concern will be taken care of more effectively if the teachers are willing to take the learners' level into account and try to use right techniques and procedures at the right proficiency level to suit their learners the best, all of which will materialize only when the teachers make themselves committed enough to their teaching duties by rigorously preparing themselves for the battlefield.

This study is by no means comprehensive and there are some limitations which may be addressed in future studies. The data were collected at one point in time in Iran, and as the nature of research in social settings entails, the views of English teachers and learners towards the characteristics of an effective English language teacher could change over time. The findings are therefore open for confirmation through replicating the research using more in-depth qualitative analyses. Furthermore, besides the positive characteristics to be possessed by an effective English language teacher, the qualities that could influence a teacher's efficacy negatively should also be studied and investigated. The study did not

either look at what other qualities English language teachers may have been supposed to possess as far as other communities such as parents, educational authorities, etc. were concerned.

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**Appendix**

**In the Name of God**

**A Questionnaire on Qualities of an Effective English Language Teacher**

This questionnaire is going to be used to investigate the qualities of an effective English language teacher from the perspective of Iranian English language teachers and students. Findings of this study are hoped to be beneficial to both Iranian English language teachers and learners. English language teachers will be able to check the suitability of their own and their colleagues' beliefs regarding foreign language teaching and learning, trying to enhance their teaching practice regarding the needs and purposes of their learners as far as possible. Learners will similarly be able to understand their teachers' beliefs and change their own wrong beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning, trying to develop more positive attitudes towards English language learning. It is worth mentioning that your participation in this research is voluntary and the data collected by means of this questionnaire will be kept confidential. Should you wish to contact the researchers during the process of research, please feel free to contact them through the following e-mail address: Homababai@yahoo.com. Thank you for your participation.

Age: ..... Sex: Male , Female

**Status:** Teacher of English at University , Student of English at University , High school teacher of English , High school student , Teacher of English in language institute , Student of English in language institute  (You can mark more than one box above.)

❖ Fill in the following part if you are teaching English:

University Degree: Lower than BA , BA , MA , PhD .

Years of English Teaching:

First Language:

Name of institute/ university/ school where you teach:

❖ Fill in the following part if you are studying English:

Years of English education:

First Language:

Name of institute/ university/ school where you Study:

**I.** Please read the following list carefully. For each statement, select the response that best represents your Agreement or Disagreement. SA, A, NI, D and SD stand for Strongly Agree, Agree, No Idea, Disagree and Strongly Disagree respectively. If you have any additional comments to add about any of the following statements, please do so in the blank space provided at the end of this table.

<b>An effective English teacher is someone who should:</b>		<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NI</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
1	Understand spoken English well.					
2	Know English culture well.					
3	Read English well.					
4	Have a high level of proficiency with English vocabulary.					
5	Write English well.					
6	Pronounce English well.					
7	Speak English well.					
8	Be fully familiar with English grammar.					
9	Prepare the lesson well.					
10	Follow syllabus tightly.					
11	Use particular methods and techniques in teaching.					
12	Manage the class time well.					
13	Assign homework.					
14	Integrate group activities to class.					
15	Be up-to-date (e.g. use internet and recent technologies in teaching).					
16	Teach how to learn English outside the classroom (teach language learning strategies).					
17	Use lesson plans.					
18	Teach English adapted to students' English proficiency levels.					
19	Maintain good classroom atmosphere using authority, if necessary.					
20	Teach English in English					
21	Teach English in Persian(students' native language)					

22	Assess what students have learned reasonably.					
23	Provide opportunities to use English through meaningful tasks and activities.					
24	Provide activities that arouse student's interest in learning English.					
25	Be helpful to students in and outside the classroom.					
26	Be available for students.					
27	Alleviate students' anxiety in English class.					
28	Listen to student's opinions and let them express themselves.					
29	Help students to develop self-confidence in order to learn English well.					
30	Be friendly to students.					
31	Have a good sense of humor.					
32	Not discriminate between students and treat them fairly.					
33	Arouse students' motivation for learning English.					
34	Show interest in students (by remembering students' names) and their learning.					
35	Be neat and tidy in appearance.					
36	Pay attention to the personal needs of students.					
37	Be polite and respect the personality of the students.					
38	Be disciplined.					
39	Be punctual.					
40	Be open to criticism.					
41	Be flexible.					
42	Be attentive in the class.					
43	Be interested in his/her career.					
44	Not lose temper and get angry.					
45	Stick to administrative rules and regulations.					
46	Assess his/her work regularly.					
Your further comments: (either in Persian or in English).						

**II.** Please answer the following questions. You can answer them either in Persian or in English.

1. Are there any particular characteristics that you believe an English Language Teacher must possess besides the characteristics that you agreed with above?
2. Are there any differences between English language teachers and other teachers in general? In what senses? Please explain.
3. Does the gender (being male or female) of an English teacher matter in his/her efficacy? How? Please explain.
4. Does the gender (being male or female) of the learners affect the English teachers' efficacy? How? Please explain.
5. Generally speaking, which of the following characteristics make an English teacher the best: knowledge of language, knowledge of pedagogy or his/her personality and the way he/she behaves the students? Why? Please explain.
6. Does the age of an English Language teacher affect his/her efficacy? Do young English Language teachers outperform older ones or vice versa? Why? Please explain.
7. Does fame (being well-known) of an English language teacher affect his/her efficacy? How? Please explain.
8. Does an English teacher's origin, for example being from Tehran or any other particular city, affect his/her efficacy? How?

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants (\* One of the teachers and four of the students did not mention their first language background)

		Teachers	Students	Total
<b>Gender</b>	Male	29	78	107
	Female	30	137	167
<b>Teaching or learning English at</b>	University	11	99	110
	High school	18	89	107
	Institute	30	27	57
<b>First language*</b>	Azeri	39	182	221
	Kurdish	6	9	15
	Persian	13	20	33
<b>Age</b>	-	29.21 ± 9.85	19.43 ± 2.96	-
<b>Years</b>	Teaching English	6.74 ± 7.03	-	-
	Learning English	-	5.31 ± 2.50	-
<b>Degree</b>	Pre-University	-	89	89
	Lower than BA	-	103	103
	BA	34	16	50
	MA	18	7	25
	PhD	7	-	7

Table 2. Means, Standard deviation and P-values of each question

Item	Teachers Mean ± SD	Students Mean ± SD	P-value
An effective English teacher is someone who should:			
1. Understand spoken English well.	4.61±0.67	4.39±0.88	0.07
2. Know English culture well.	4.27±0.81	4.14±0.96	0.45
3. Read English well.	4.63±0.69	4.53±0.79	0.36
4. Have a high level of proficiency in English vocabulary.	4.34±0.80	4.25±1.03	0.94
5. Write English well.	4.29±0.87	4.36±0.86	0.42
6. Pronounce English well.	4.53±0.86	4.60±0.77	0.59
7. Speak English well.	4.58±0.72	4.36±1.04	0.23
8. Be fully familiar with English grammar.	4.42±0.81	4.34±0.90	0.56
<b>9. Prepare the lesson well.</b>	<b>4.56±0.77</b>	<b>4.24±1.05</b>	<b>*0.02</b>
10. Follow the syllabus tightly.	3.75±1.14	3.73±1.21	0.98
11. Use particular methods and techniques in teaching.	4.19±0.92	3.93±1.01	0.06
12. Manage the class time well.	4.31±0.99	4.22±0.88	0.24
<b>13. Assign homework.</b>	<b>3.98±1.12</b>	<b>3.46±1.22</b>	<b>**0.001</b>
<b>14. Integrate group activities to class.</b>	<b>4.34±0.96</b>	<b>3.81±1.16</b>	<b>**0.0003</b>
<b>15. Be up-to-date (e.g. use internet and recent technologies in teaching).</b>	<b>4.32±0.90</b>	<b>3.99±1.14</b>	<b>*0.05</b>
16. Teach how to learn English outside the classroom (teach language learning strategies).	4.22±0.87	4.15±0.93	0.70
<b>17. Use lesson plans.</b>	<b>4.12±1.02</b>	<b>3.85±0.94</b>	<b>*0.01</b>
18. Teach English adapted to students' English proficiency levels.	4.22±0.93	4.16±0.95	0.66
19. Maintain good classroom atmosphere using authority, if necessary.	4.22±0.93	3.96±1.12	0.13
20. Teach English in English	4.05±1.01	3.79±1.24	0.27
<b>21. Teach English in Persian (students' native language)</b>	<b>2.22±1.42</b>	<b>2.69±1.35</b>	<b>**0.009</b>
<b>22. Assess what students have learned reasonably.</b>	<b>4.32±0.78</b>	<b>4.03±0.92</b>	<b>*0.026</b>
23. Provide opportunities to use English through meaningful tasks and activities.	4.44±0.82	4.31±0.83	0.14
24. Provide activities that arouse student's interest in learning English.	4.58±0.72	4.47±0.82	0.36

25. Be helpful to students in and outside the classroom.	4.20±0.83	4.27±0.88	0.34
26. Be available for students.	3.92±0.97	4.12±0.90	0.15
27. Alleviate students' anxiety in the English class.	4.29±0.89	4.26±0.94	0.90
28. Listen to student's opinions and let them express themselves.	4.36±0.92	4.44±0.75	0.82
29. Help students to develop self-confidence in order to learn English well.	4.68±0.54	4.47±0.80	0.09
30. Be friendly to students.	4.31±0.84	4.49±0.76	0.06
31. Have a good sense of humor.	4.05±0.99	4.13±1.04	0.40
32. Not discriminate between students and treat them fairly.	4.46±0.77	4.48±0.82	0.58
33. Arouse students' motivation for learning English.	4.63±0.61	4.40±0.88	0.09
34. Show interest in students (by remembering students' names) and their learning.	4.51±0.63	4.37±0.84	0.44
<b>35. Be neat and tidy in appearance.</b>	<b>4.49±0.70</b>	<b>4.20±0.95</b>	<b>*0.04</b>
36. Pay attention to the personal needs of students.	3.92±0.93	3.69±1.13	0.24
37. Be polite and respect the personality of the students.	4.63±0.61	4.52±0.78	0.46
38. Be disciplined.	4.25±0.96	4.10±1.07	0.34
39. Be punctual.	4.47±0.88	4.23±1	0.06
40. Be open to criticism.	4.27±0.89	4.32±0.82	0.80
41. Be flexible.	4.12±1.12	4.19±0.88	0.84
42. Be attentive in the class.	4.47±0.68	4.22±0.97	0.12
43. Be interested in his/her career.	4.46±0.95	4.33±0.88	0.13
44. Not lose temper and get angry.	4.39±0.64	4.11±1.05	0.21
45. Stick to administrative rules and regulations.	3.59±1.19	3.56±1.21	0.88
46. Assess his/her work regularly.	4.20±0.76	4.03±0.89	0.19

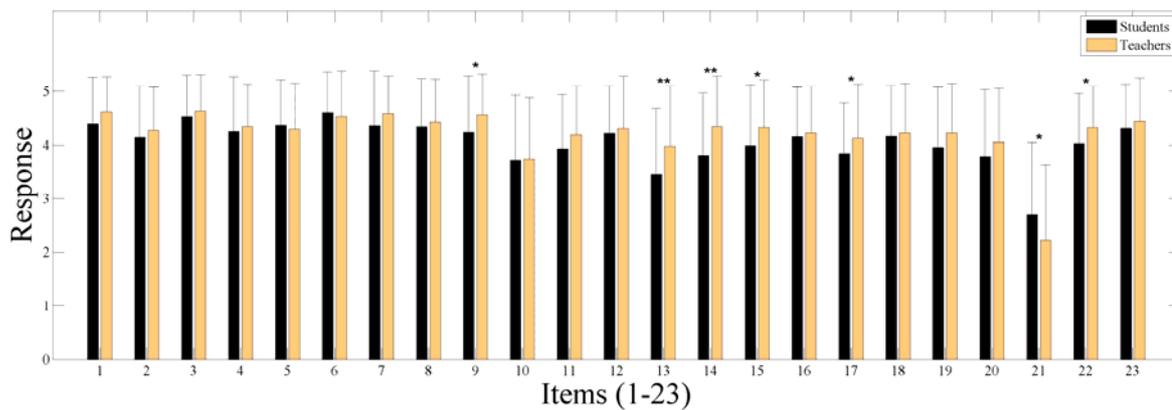


Figure 1. Means and standard deviations of participants' responses to items 1-23

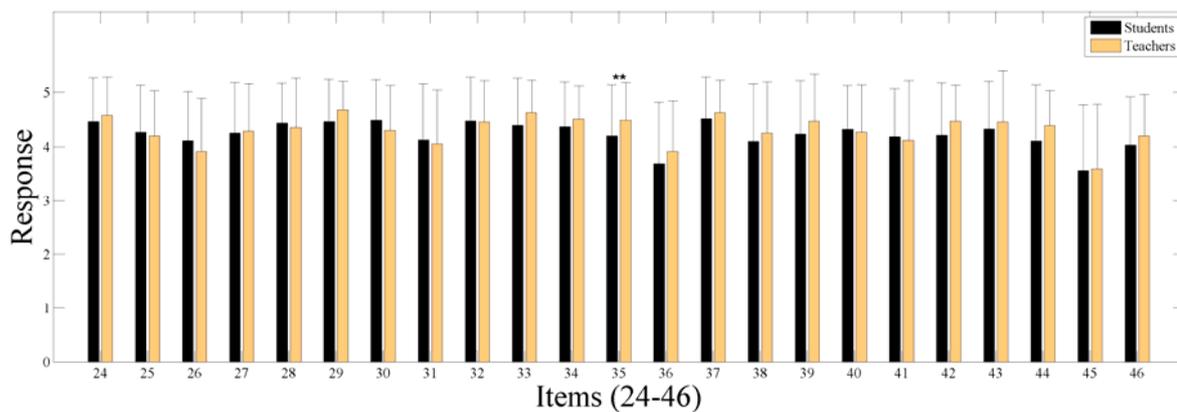


Figure 2. Means and standard deviations of participants' responses to items 24-46