EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ATTRIBUTES PERCEIVED by EFL STUDENTS: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS in a TURKISH CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the perceptions of a group of Turkish English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students on the attributes of effective language teachers. Data for this study were collected from 140 preparatory year EFL undergraduate students at Western Languages and Literature Department at Karadeniz Technical University. The students were given a questionnaire which included five categories of attributes that define effective language teachers: Rapport, Delivery, Fairness, Knowledge and Credibility, and Organization and Preparation. The results showed that the students placed the highest importance on Knowledge and Credibility attribute which included a good knowledge of English and being qualified for English teaching. They also rated highly rapport attributes such as care, friendliness, and patience and delivery attributes such as providing clear explanations and good examples. Fairness and lesson preparation were also considered important attributes. This research has implications for foreign language teachers interested in enhancing and improving their teaching.

Keywords: Teacher characteristics, Effective Language Teacher, EFL students

DİL ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ETKİLİ İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLERİN ÖZELLİKLERİ HAKKINDA ALGILARI: TÜRKİYE BAĞLAMINDA NİCEL BİR ARAŞTIRMA

ÖZ

Bu araştırma İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerinin etkili bir yabancı dil öğretmeni hakkındaki algılarını tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın çalışma evrenini Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı'nda okuyan 140 lisans hazırlık sınıfı öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmada öğrencilere etkili bir yabancı dil öğretmenini tanımlayan özellikleri içeren 40 soruluk bir anket uygulanmıştır. Söz konusu özellikler ankette 5 grup altında verilmiştir: İletişim, Dersi Sunma, Tarafsızlık, Alan Bilgisi ve Güvenilirlik ve Organizasyon ve Planlama. Çalışmanın sonucunda öğrencilerin en çok önem verdikleri özelliğin İngilizce Alan Bilgisi ve Güvenirlilik olduğu görülmüştür. Öğrenciler ayrıca Öğrenci-Öğretmen ilişkisi boyutunda "ilgi", "samimiyet", "sabır", Dersi Sunma boyutunda da "anlaşılır açıklamalar yapma" ve "konunun içeriğine uygun örnekler verme" yüksek oranda önemli bulmuşlardır. "Tarafsızlık" ve "derse hazırlanma" da öğrenciler tarafından önemli bulunmuştur. Çalışmanın sonucunda yabancı dil öğretmenleri için önemli bulgular elde edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğretmen Özellikleri, Etkili Dil Öğretmeni, İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen Öğrenciler

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INTRODUCTION

One of the basic principles of a good qualified education system lies on teachers' efficiency which can be defined by policy makers, teachers' self-perceptions and students. As Barnes and Lock (2013) state, the mutual consensus on the characteristics of a good language teacher by both teacher and students is of crucial importance as contrasting views of class and lesson contents may result in losing learner's confidence in the teacher's capabilities. If the students do not trust in their teacher's abilities, keeping them as active learners would seem improbable. Therefore, many studies (Borg, 2006; Brosh, 1996; Çelik et al, 2013; Drakulic, 2013; Kourieos and Evripidou, 2013; Lee, 2010, to name only a few) have been done to make a parallelism between the expectations of both teachers and learners from a fruitful classroom environment.

During the recent years, there has been an increasing demand for classes which require more learner participation during class procedures and lesson contents (Brown, 2009). However, establishing a learner-centered class should not be confined to only lesson contents. Unfortunately, it seems there are often communication barriers among teachers and students, and this deficiency in foreign language classes takes a more serious shape when the medium of communication is not the learners' first language. Therefore, providing anonymous opportunities for learners to express their opinions is of high importance for rising learner participation and achievement in the classroom. As Williams and Burden (1997) assert, in some classes there might exist a discrepancy between teachers' and learners' opinion of an efficient language teacher and according to Schulz (1996), this may lead in learners' discontinuing their foreign language studies; moreover, it is vital to determine learners' expectations as it affects students' educational performance and success (Ketsman, 2012).

There is an old (Symonds, 1955; Witty, 1947) and big literature (Brosh, 1996; Borg, 2006; Drakulic, 2013; Nussbaum, 1992; Cruickshank, 1986) on the topic of effective teacher which displays the importance of quality teaching for the triangle of educational institutions, students, and teachers. However, as if the results are tailored for the environments in which the study has been conducted and only few of the effective teacher characteristics can be generalized. Malikow's (2006), students through a reflective paper described the *exceptionally effective teacher* as a person who employs material effectively, motivates students, provides a learning environment, has a good relationship with students as well as being familiar with their interest areas and manages class in a disciplined way. Walker (2008) during fifteen years asked his students who were inservice and pre-service teachers to write essays about effective teacher characteristics. More than one thousand students defined an effective teacher as an educator who comes to class prepared, has positive attitudes towards teaching and students, is creative and behaves fairly, has a sense of humor, respects students and does not humiliate them, admits mistakes and is forgiving.

In the foreign language field, a series of predominant studies has been done by Elaine Horwitz during the 1980s to make teachers' and learners' opinions clear about learning environment. She developed three instruments called "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory" (BALLI) (1985, cited in Kuntz, 1996: 1) which one of them was in relation with foreign language students' belief about language learning and teaching. Later, Horwitz (1988) administered it to language teachers and beginner-level students and found that students hold a variety of beliefs about their language teachers. She added some of the results might astonish the teachers and some could affirm teachers' educational background about the students' opinions. Kern (1995) also administered BALLI to the French as a foreign language first-year students who displayed complex beliefs contradicting with teachers' expectations.

Bell (2005) argues that, as with the other disciplines, there is no one single accepted definition of effective foreign language teaching. A review of the literature displays the fact that how an effective teaching is a multi-dimensional profession as teachers and learners express reverse rationales for an effective teacher. Babai Shishivan and Sadeghi (2009) attempted to reveal descriptions of a qualified teacher made by language teachers and learners. While teachers give weight to assigning homework, applying group activities in the classroom, knowledge of target language and pedagogical skills; students agree that the integration of mother tongue, teacher's personality and the way s/he behaves to students are the most important features of an effective language teacher. In another study, Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011), studied students' perceptions under the three categories of subject knowledge, teaching knowledge and socio-affective skills. They posited that in teaching knowledge and socio-affective skills, high achievement students consider different attributes in comparing with low achievement students. Furthermore, in socio-affective skills, female and male students mark different characteristics. In another study done by Kourieos and Evripidou (2013), participants of the study recognize an effective teacher as a person who takes into account learners' individual abilities, interests and anxieties. Moreover, technology-based instruction and employment of authentic material are among the criteria learners attribute to efficient language teachers.

In spite of large number of bibliographic references to grasp the idea of the effective teacher characteristics, it seems educational systems prefer to search for quality teaching in their own context, too. Different studies conducted in Turkey demonstrate the multifaceted concept of an 'effective language teacher'. Learners may consider maintaining the positive communication and a friendly class atmosphere created by an enthusiastic, young and humorous teacher as the most defining features of an effective language teaching profession (Arıkan et al, 2008; İşpir, 2002; Telli, den Broke and Çakıroğlu, 2008). Another study (Çelik Korkmaz and Yavuz, 2011) done in the same region reports that learners depict an effective English teacher as a person who can "transfer his/her knowledge as comprehensively as possible" (p. 218), motivate learners

and be fair during the assessment process. Likewise, the Turkish students give importance to being fair, reducing anxiety, being treated with kindness, possessing qualified language knowledge, and being capable of mother tongue usage to clarify explanations (Çelik, et al., 2013). They add that students expect their non-native teachers to be capable of switching to mother tongue for clarifications which is in parallel with Babai Shishivan and Sadeghi's (2009) findings.

Faranda and Clarke (2004) conducted a qualitative study to clarify the notion of an effective professor perceived by undergraduate business students. Students' descriptions which were collected through in-depth interviews resulted in five categories – *rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge and credibility, and organization and preparation* – as described in Table 1.

Previous research (Barnes and Lock, 2010; Barnes and Lock, 2013; Chireshe, 2011) has employed these five attribute categories to search for the learners' opinion about the qualities of an effective foreign language teacher, too. Building on Faranda and Clarke's taxonomy (2004), this paper tries to extend the sense of which attributes form the concept of 'an effective English Language Teacher' in Department of Western Languages and Literature, Trabzon, Turkey. Thus, the present study hopes to contribute to the current literature by investigating how these attributes are perceived by EFL students in a Turkish language learning context.

Table 1: Description of Faranda and Clarke's (2004: 274) five attribute categories

Attributed Categories	Students' Descriptions
Rapport	Be sincere and show humor, learn students names, etc.
Delivery	Monitor students learning, force students to think not to imitate
Fairness	Be unbiased towards all students, employ objective scoring, ask questions from materials taught in class, etc.
Knowledge and credibility	Employ personal experience, Teach by examples, etc.
Organization and preparation	To have clear learning goals, Give detailed explanation for each assignment, update teaching material, etc.

Source: Faranda, W.T., and Clarke. (2004). Student observations of outstanding teaching: Implications for marketing educators. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 26(3), 271-281.

1. METHODOLOGY

The present study employed a questionnaire which asked participants about their perceptions of the attributes of effective language teachers. The participants of the study were 140 preparatory year EFL undergraduate students at the Department of Western Languages and Literature at Karadeniz Technical University, Trabzon. Of these students, 98 (70%) were female and 36 (25, 7%) were male. 6 students (4, 3%) did not indicate gender.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of 40 items requiring students to rate attributes of effective English teachers on a seven point scale from '1' (strongly disagree) to '7' (strongly agree). These 40 items were taken from the attributes listed in Barnes and Lock (2010; 2013) which are categorized into five sections based on Faranda and Clarke's study (2004).

The second part asked students to rank the importance of Faranda and Clarke's (2004) five attribute categories: Relationship with students, communication skill and teaching method, fairness, knowledge of English and organization and preparation. Responses to the first part of the questionnaire were analyzed by calculating mean responses and the standard deviations. For the second part of the questionnaire, mean rankings of five categories were compared and a Friedman test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in mean rankings.

2. FINDINGS

The findings of the questionnaire were first grouped into 5 subsections: Rapport, Delivery, Fairness, Knowledge and Credibility and Organization and Preparation. The tables below show data related to the overall mean scores of students' perceptions concerning the categories mentioned above.

2.1. Rapport

This sub-section gives the findings associated with students' perceptions of a language teacher who takes an interest in their students and in developing classroom atmosphere. Table 2 presents the overall mean scores of students' perceptions on the rapport attributes of an effective language teacher.

Effective Language Teachers	N	Mean	SD
6.listen to students	140	6,45	,85
5.are patient	138	6,32	,87
1.are friendly	140	6,26	,86
2.develop good relations with students	140	6,25	,92
4.care about students	135	6,15	1,04
7.have positive character in general	137	6,10	,98
10. understand the different student levels	139	6,05	1,27
11.have sense of humour	139	5,89	1,10
3.share personal experiences	140	5,85	1,08
9. understand the student's English education background.	137	5,48	1,64
8.have charisma	137	4,64	1,72

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Rapport Items

As seen in the table, the attributes which related to teachers' friendliness, good relationships, care, patience, receptiveness, positive character, and understanding of student levels were all rated over 6. The highest level of importance among rapport items was given to listening to students, with a mean score of 6,45. Other rapport attributes including Item 11 (have sense of humour), Item 3 (share personal experiences) and Item 9 (understand the student's English education background) were also seen as important, although slightly, with mean scores of 5,89, 5,85 and 5,48 respectively. The eighth item which was associated with the teacher's charisma received the lowest score, indicating that such characteristic was not identified as important by EFL students.

2.2. Delivery

This sub-section gives the findings associated with students' perceptions of a language teacher's personal style, communication and methodology. Table 3 presents the overall mean scores of students' perceptions on the delivery attributes of an effective language teacher.

As seen in the table, Item 13 (give clear explanations) and Item 14 (use good examples) had the highest mean scores of 6,35 and 6,36 respectively, which is consistent with the findings of Barnes and Lock (2013). The items related to questioning (Item 28 and Item 26) obtained high mean scores of 6,32 and 5,89 respectively, which verifies the literature on the importance of extended wait time in the EFL classroom (Walsh, 2012). Similarly, the importance of teacher enthusiasm was confirmed by the responses to Item 12 (are enthusiastic about teaching), which recorded a mean score of 6,27 (Kim and Schallert, 2014; Patrick and Kempler, 2002).

Items related to methodological behaviors of language teachers (15, 17, 21, and 22) elicited particularly high mean responses. Given the extensive amount of research that supports language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Ay, 2010; Aydın, 2008; Subaşı, 2010), the participants in this study reported that they want to be corrected and encouraged to participate in class.

Effective Language Teachers		Mean	SD
13. give clear explanations	139	6,35	,96
14. use good examples	137	6,34	,91
28.give students enough time to answer questions	136	6,32	,90
12.are enthusiastic about teaching English	137	6,27	1,17
17.correct students' errors	140	6,25	1,00
15.use a variety of teaching methods	137	6,18	1,09
21.encourage student participation in class		6,09	1,31
22.encourage participation of students with low confidence		6,06	1,29

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Delivery Items

26.ask questions then wait for volunteers to answer	139	5,89	1,27
16.use Turkish selectively	139	5,61	1,44
23.talk slowly in English	139	5,53	1,41
25.ask questions frequently	137	5,51	1,21
24.use easy words	139	5,41	1,30
27.ask individual students to answer questions	139	5,13	1,52
20.use group work	138	5,11	1,45

Clarity attributes including Item 16 (use Turkish selectively), Item 23 (talk slowly in the target language) and Item 24 (use easy words) were also seen as important, albeit slightly, with mean scores of 5,61, 5,53 and 5,41, respectively. This finding reveals students' preferences for clarity of communication in the classroom. Item 20 (use group work) was also seen as important, although slightly, with a mean score of 5,11.

2.3. Fairness

This sub-section gives the findings associated with students' perceptions of a language teacher's impartiality, examination preparation, grading, transparency, and workload. Table 4 presents the overall mean scores of students' perceptions on the fairness attributes of an effective language teacher.

Effective Language Teachers N Mean SD 29. treat all students fairly 136 6,26 1.19 31. give students clear grading guidelines 139 6,20 1,23 30.prepare students well for exams 137 5,96 1,55

137

140

5,78

5,73

1,18

1,10

Table 4: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Fairness Items

Much research on fairness demonstrates biased attitude of the teachers is not approved by the learners (Barnes &Lock, 2010; Desai, Damewood & Jones, 2001; Faranda & Clarke, 2004; Peart & Campbell, 1999). Consistent with these research findings, the highest ranking, among the fairness items, was assigned to the item 29 that addressed participants' responses towards the teachers who treat all students equally. Again, students mostly agreed that teachers should give clear grading guidelines, but slightly agreed on the requirement to do homework (M=5.78) and hard work during class (M=5, 73).

2.4. Knowledge and Credibility

33.require students to do homework

32.require students to work a lot during class

This sub-section gives the findings associated with students' perceptions of a language teacher's knowledge of English. Table 5 presents the overall mean scores of

students' perceptions on the knowledge and Credibility attributes of an effective language teacher.

Table 5: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Fairness Items

Effective Language Teachers	N	Mean	SD
35.have a good knowledge of English	140	6,60	,81
34.are well qualified for EFL teaching	138	6,52	,92
18.have knowledge about the courses they teach	139	6,44	.76

As seen in the table, all knowledge and credibility items scored over 6. The highest mean value (6, 60) was reported for EFL teachers who "have a good knowledge of English". This was the highest of all the 40 attributes tested in the questionnaire. The result confirmed the findings of Javid, Farooq, and Gulzar (2012) who investigated the causes of ineffective English language teaching in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and found the scarcity of well-qualified teachers as one of the main causes. In EFL context, most research showed similar results showing that students prefer teachers who are proficient in the target language (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Brosh, 1996; Chen, 2012; Park & Lee, 2006). Responses to the other knowledge and credibility items showed that students expected language teachers to be well qualified for language teaching (M= 6, 52) and have knowledge about the courses they teach (M= 6, 44).

2.5. Organization and Preparation

This sub-section gives the findings associated with students' perceptions of a language teacher's preparation for the class, use of materials and adherence to the syllabus. Table 6 presents the overall mean scores of students' perceptions on the Organization and Preparation attributes of an effective language teacher.

 Table 6: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Organization and Preparation Items

Effective Language Teachers		Mean	SD
36.are well prepared for every lesson	140	6,37	,89
40.explain the instructional methods to the class	140	6,07	,98
19.make their own supplemental material	135	5,77	1,05
37.provide a plan which includes weekly course content	138	5,76	1,16
39.tell the students the lesson objectives each lesson	140	5,80	1,16
38. stick to the syllabus	136	5,62	1,24

Among the Organization and Preparation attributes, the highest value was assigned to (with a mean value of 6, 37) to the teachers who are well prepared for lessons. This finding confirms the study of Barnes and Lock (2013) who also found that students overwhelmingly supported the attribute of teacher preparation and the mean response was the highest of all the 42 attributes tested in their questionnaire (M = 6, 51). The other preparation attribute, providing a plan which includes weekly course content, received a slightly low mean response (5, 76).

The other mean scores indicate that students appreciated the information about the instructional methods used in the class (M=6,07) and the objectives of the lessons (M=5,80). Barnes and Lock (2010) revealed that students believed that this information about instructional methods and objectives helped students to understand the purpose and context of lessons. Lastly, preparation of supplemental material (Item 19) and adherence to the syllabus (Item 38) were considered slightly important by the participants of this study, (M=5,77 and M=5,62, respectively).

The second part of the questionnaire asked participants to rank the importance of Faranda and Clarke's (2004) five attribute categories: Rapport, Delivery, Fairness, Knowledge and Credibility, and Organization and Preparation. To get an overall picture, relative rankings of these five categories were calculated. Table 7 provides an overview of the comparative importance of the five attribute categories perceived by the participants.

A further analysis was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in mean rankings of all five attribute categories. A Friedman test for differences in mean rankings revealed significant variability among rankings, ($\chi 2$ (2) = 560.000, p = 0.000).

Overall Mean Ranking **Attribute Category** Ranking Knowledge and Credibility (Knowledge of English) 2.09 1 2 Delivery (Communication skill and teaching method) 2.35 3 Rapport (Relationship with students) 2.41 4 3.17 Fairness 5 Organization and Preparation 3.34

Table 7: Relative Rankings of the Attribute Categories

Notes: Mean rank is calculated such that 1=most important, 2=second most important, 3=third most important, 4=fourth most important, and 5=least important. The Friedman test, applied to mean ranks for each motive, shows that all rankings are statistically different (p<0.05).

The results show that Knowledge and Credibility was considered the most important category. This confirmed our finding that the highest mean value (6,60) was reported for EFL teachers who "have a good knowledge of English". This was the highest of all the 40 attributes tested in the questionnaire. Delivery was the second most important category before Rapport. This result is in line with the findings of Park and Lee (2006) who reported that Korean high school EFL students rank pedagogical knowledge the highest. Similarly, in Barnes and Lock's (2013) study, these two attributes occupied the first two places, but Delivery ranked before Knowledge and Credibility. These results, together with findings mentioned above, may indicate a particular preference given to subject matter knowledge of EFL teachers among language students.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to identify student perceptions of the attributes of effective EFL teachers from a Turkish university. Overall results of data analysis revealed that students preferred a language teacher who (1) listens to them, (2) gives clear explanations, (3) treats all students fairly, (4) has a good knowledge of English, and (5) is well prepared for every lesson.

The first attribute investigated was 'Classroom Rapport' which is a key to teaching effectiveness (Lowman, 1994). Classroom rapport was found to be positively associated to students' attention, attendance, and enjoyment of teacher and course (Benson, Cohen, Buskist, 2005). The students in this study preferred teachers with friendly attitudes towards them and who listens to and cares about them. This finding, which is in line with previous studies (e.g. Barnes & Lock, 2013; Chen & Lin, 2009) reveals again the importance of building a classroom atmosphere that reduces affective filter (Krashen, 1982). One unexpected result of our study is students' low preference for charismatic teachers. The results showed that students placed less importance on teachers' popularity, which requires further investigation.

Students in this study also appreciated teachers who give clear explanations and use good examples while delivering lessons. Moreover, they felt that language teachers should be enthusiastic about teaching English and use a variety of teaching methods, while at the same encouraging student participation. Consistent with previous research (Barnes and Lock, 2010, 2013; Brosh, 1996; Chen, 2012), fairness attribute was perceived to be one of the important characteristics of effective EFL teachers.

In the current study, Knowledge and Credibility was considered the most important attribute of effective language teachers. The students placed the highest value on language teachers' language proficiency and pedagogical skills. They believed that an effective language teacher should have a good knowledge of English and be qualified for English teaching. The same finding was reported by Park and Lee (2006) and Brosh (1996) in their study of high school FL students in Korea and Israel, respectively.

This study suggests that EFL learners have many expectations of their English teachers. The results thus highlight the complex and multifaceted role of the English teacher. Involved in such a difficult undertaking, language teachers can benefit from an awareness of what is expected of them and what works in all aspects of language teaching. With such an awareness, they may reflect on their teaching behaviors and make decisions accordingly (Bell, 2005; Ostorga, 2006). As Richards and Farrell (2005: 3) claims, "teachers need regular opportunities to update their professional knowledge". Thus, the present study hopes to contribute to the current literature by investigating how these attributes are perceived by EFL students in a Turkish language learning context.

This study has limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the results are based on the self-reported perceptions of Turkish EFL

students in Turkey. Hence the generalizability of the findings may be limited to those students participated in the study. Another limitation concerns the data elicitation instrument used. The questionnaire used in the study cannot alone give a complete description of the students' beliefs about the attributes of effective language teachers. Some of the items in the questionnaire are related specifically to the teaching of English, while others are universal features associated with the teaching of other subject matters. As stated previously, there is no common definition of what constitutes effective language teaching. Bell (2005), points out that many characteristics of effective teachers are not discipline specific; however, there are certain behaviors that distinguish foreign language teachers from other teachers. As Murray and Renaud (1995) note, some teaching behaviors and attitudes are considered more relevant in one discipline than in another. In this respect, it is clear that the characteristics of an effective language teacher is not limited only to these attributes examined in this study and surely involve many other issues related specifically to foreign language teaching. Therefore, further studies could be done taking into account the dynamic nature of the language, scope and complexity of the content of teaching, the teaching methodology, the interaction between language teachers and learners, and issues relating to the status of native and non-native language teachers (Borg, 2006).

Further studies on attributes of effective language teachers could also focus on individual characteristics that students agree less strongly with. Qualitative interviews would surely provide more in-depth information on the students' perceptions. It would also be useful to investigate the perceptions of students with different background, level and academic success, which may reveal different needs and expectations from their English teachers.

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