

QUALITIES OF 'GOOD' TEACHERS – A CASE STUDY IN MACEDOIA

Lulzime Kamberi

University of Tetovo – Tetovo, Republic of Macedonia l.kamberi12@gmail.com

Abstract: English Language teaching (ELT) and issues related to it have been a topic of discussion for centuries in the whole globe among teachers and other relative parties dealing with the subject. One topic that has been widely debated is motivation, as one of the most important factors influencing learning and progress in language teaching. Motivation can be related to many aspects of teaching but it is believed that two main factors relevant to it are undoubtedly teachers and learners, due to the fact that they both contribute to learning and progress. Furthermore, Horwitz (1985) among others states that teacher and student perceptions associated with issues of teaching and learning should be compatible if success is expected, which shows the relevance of these two elements and their relationship. The study seeks to analyze what 'good' teacher qualities are according to student perceptions, and what they are according to teacher perceptions by asking respondents to identify concepts. Additionally, it seeks to analyze the similarities and differences of beliefs between these two groups. The study was conducted in an English Language Teaching (ELT) Methodology course, in the second semester of the year 2016, at the department of English Language and Literature, at the Faculty of Philology, at the University of Tetovo (UT). Using a combined data collection method, quantitative and qualitative data gathering approaches have been used. Applying content analysis (Brown&Rodgers, 2002) to identify themes biases and meaning, the study investigated students' attitudes towards qualities of good teachers. Convenience sampling among students enrolled in the sixth semester identified a non-random sample of 46 (n=46) students representing 38% of the possible cohort. Likewise, teachers' perceptions have been investigated by using an open-ended questionnaire with teacher volunteers (n=8), representing 48% of the possible cohort. An initial quantitative analysis applying frequency statistics to calculate the frequency of the mentioned characteristics by students against the teacher participant's characteristics has been applied. Content analytical procedures were then followed to student responses to confirm the descriptive and inferential statistics previously established. Results from the quantitative section of this study have shown the differences and similarities between the two study groups. In contrast, content analysis suggests that significant factors are likely to emerge more clearly from a larger sample. In conclusion it is argued that research designs involving an extended period of time and with a larger sample will be needed to confirm factors potentially affecting the differences and similarities of both study groups.

Keywords: ELT, motivation, qualities of good teachers, student perceptions, teacher perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning has been a topic of discussion throughout the history of humanity. Two main subjects are undoubtedly teachers and learners since they are the main 'actors' of this 'play'. The former on one side are seen as the ones who must contribute to the success of the other, and on the other are blamed for their failure. Harmer in his book *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (2001) along with other language components like, the main and sub skills has devoted one chapter (chapter 3) describing learners and another one (chapter 4) describing teachers (pp. 37-66). In these chapters, he focuses on learner characteristics, like age, differences, and motivation (pp. 37-52). The other chapter devoted to teachers focuses on teacher roles, like performer and aid among others (pp. 56-66). When describing learners, Harmer (ibid.) states that learner differences are very important because their aptitude needs to be taken into consideration. He goes on by focusing on learner styles in which he mentions *convergers*, *conformists*, *concrete learners* and *communicative learners* among others (p. 43). The purpose of this is to understand 'different individuals' and their preferences. Based on these preferences, we come to the perceptions of learners and teachers. According to these perceptions, which according to many scholars (Horwitz, 1985, 1997, 1998; Oxford, 1990; Barcelos, 2002; Ellis, 2001, etc) need to match, in order effective teaching and learning to take place. These perceptions or beliefs about language learning and teaching affect learning outcomes according to Shishavan & Sadeghi (2009). These concepts form the basis for this small scale research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A wide range of studies over the past decades has compared teacher and learner beliefs and their effect on learning outcomes. Shishvan & Sadghi (ibid), have conducted a study to characterize qualities of an effective English language teacher based on Iranian English language teachers and learners' beliefs. They used a questionnaire that was given 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 English language teachers. For example, teachers agreed more strongly than students that a teacher

should assign homework and integrate group activities into the classroom. Also, significant differences were in opinions of 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 a teacher. 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 English language teacher; whereas, learners gave more weight to characteristics relating to a teacher's personality and the way he behaves toward his students (p.1). Their study showed that there are differences in perceptions of these two groups and that teachers need to focus on these differences.

Not only have been studies conducted analyzing language teachers but also those of other subjects too. Singh et al. (2013) have conducted a study analyzing good teacher qualities based on faculty perceptions. They have comprised a questionnaire with 24 questions on a five point Likert scale. The themes were grouped into four categories: Classroom behavior/instructional delivery, interaction with students, personal qualities and professional development, and analyzed with respect to discipline, cultural background, gender and teaching experience. The top three desirable qualities of an effective teacher in the study were knowledge of subject, enthusiasm and communication skills. Faculty with longer teaching experience ranked classroom behavior/instructional delivery higher than their less experienced counterparts. There was no difference of perspectives based on cultural background, gender or discipline.

As Ellis (2008) has argued, "Teachers also need to accept that it is their responsibility to ensure that their students stay motivated, and they should not complain that students do not bring any motivation to the classroom." (p.5). This is also supported by Dorney & Schmidt (2001), cited in Ellis (2008), who claim that the best intervention would be to improve the quality of teaching. They argue that making teachers responsible for their students' success and motivation is the means for this improvement. As teachers, therefore, we should give our best to improve our teaching to keep pace with teachers across the rest of the world. At this point, it seems, increased recognition of the students' beliefs, would be an essential strategy for improving our teaching.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. THE FOUNDATION FOR THIS PAPER

In an effort to help my students to learn more easily and to introduce more strategies for them to become successful and autonomous learners, I decided to conduct a study with students and teachers in order to be given an insight into what students believe to be a good teacher and what teachers believed.

3.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In an age when students at UT have wide and increasing accessibility to the internet, and with this to the whole globe, it seems self-evident that the potential for differences among students and teacher should be researched systematically with a view to increasing teaching effectiveness in the language learning context.

Based on my professional teaching interest and informed by the emerging findings reported in the brief literature review above, the research questions addressed in this paper include:

1. What are students' perceptions of 'GOOD' teachers?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of "GOOD" teachers?
3. What are the similarities and differences among these two groups?

3.3. THE STUDY

The preliminary study reported in this paper was undertaken with 46 (n=46) students representing 38% of the possible cohort. Likewise, teachers' perceptions have been investigated by using an open-ended questionnaire with teacher volunteers (n=8), representing 48% of the possible cohort.

Following a written reflection paper reporting on their perceptions, they were invited to discuss their learning experiences in a second, confirmatory stage of the study. Teachers were given a questionnaire in which they had to list the good teacher characteristic from 1-10.

The results of students' reflection and interviews and the students' questionnaire form a basis for the tentative conclusions derived from this study.

3.4. PARTICIPANTS

Acknowledging convenience sampling, the 46 subjects who participated in this study volunteered from the 72 students who were attending my English Language Teaching Methodology course in the English department of the University of Tetovo Faculty (n=46). Participants ranged in age from 20 - 21 years old. Females constituted 82% of

the sample group (n=41) with the remaining 18% being male (n=5). The teacher sample consisted of eight teachers (n=8) out of the 15 engaged teachers at the same department.

3.5. INSTRUMENTS

Seeking to differentiate perceptions between teachers and students, the study consisted of quantitative and qualitative instruments. The qualitative instruments are student reflections in form of an essay and student; whereas the quantitative ones consisted of teacher questionnaires consisting of a 10 scale in which teachers had to list the “good” teacher characteristic

3.6 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data derived from the qualitative instruments was triangulated by using methodological triangulation based on Brown&Rodgers (2002). This means that multiple data-gathering procedures like questionnaires and student reflections were used. Student reflections were analyzed using inferencing based on the main topics mentioned and listed by students. These were than compared, by using comparative analysis, to those mentioned and listed by teachers. A frequency of each item occurrence was than analyzed (see table 1 below).

4. RESULTS

As stated in the previous section 3. 5&3.6, the study used a combined method of data collection and analyzes. Qualitative data were gathered first, in the form of student reflection essays. These essays were analyzed using Content analyses to analyze themes and topics that students have come up with. Following the essay analysis, teachers were given a questionnaire in which they had to rank teacher qualities on ten-point scale.

4.1 Student responses

Based on the study results, it seems that topics like, behavior, subject knowledge, performance, motivation were among the topmost mentioned by students. Other minor themes derived from the study were authority, morality, assessment.

Looking at the top themes resulting from the majority of responses, *kindness* seems to be the most important one. This can be probably an indication of student age mentioned earlier by Harmer. They possibly want to be treated as colleagues and not students anymore. The second theme related to teacher performance seems also to be of great relevance to students because teacher conduct has an immense impact on student success. Close to theme one, is related theme three, namely communicate with students. Teachers need to be aware of the relevance of the student age as stated in Harmer (2001) and create a closer relationship with students. Classroom management and motivation were the other themes mentioned by many students. Finally, themes that came only up by some individuals were morality, authority and good marks on exams. These were probably individual experiences which need some thought and care by institutions.

Table 1. Student themes

Theme	Occurrence
Be kind	12
Be prepared	9
Communicate with st	8
Be knowledgeable	5
Involve all students	4
Creative lessons	3
Motivate students	2
Positive atmosphere	2
Love job	1
Correct st mistakes	1
Have moral	1
Be authoritative	1
Give good marks	1

St: refers to students

4.2 Teacher responses

Based on teacher responses, in this study the punctuality was ranked the highest, followed by ‘well prepared’, which in other words means commitment to work (See table 2 below). This seems to correspond to what students have ranked second, namely, ‘prepared well’ for lessons.

What students have not mentioned and teachers have ranked third is the ‘focus on learning outcomes’, a topic never mentioned by students.

Another important theme mentioned by teachers and students is creativity which can be compared to teachers’ ‘phenomena’. whereas, learners gave more weight to One of the teachers has mentioned studying ‘phenomena’ is what we need to focus nowadays and students have mentioned creativity and innovations.

One point both parties have brought up and that needs further attention relates to management ‘being strict’. Other minor themes brought up by both respondents were evaluation, carrying, and academic ethics. The latter seems to be a topic mentioned by both groups, ethics and morality, as two important factors in academic settings.

Table 2. Teacher topics

Theme	Occurrence
Punctuality	3
Well prepared	3
Focus on learning outcomes	3
Strict	1
Caring	1
Passion for work	1
Care about st problems	1
Be innovative	1
Focus on phenomena	1
Having general evaluation skills	1
Clear objectives	1
Follow academic ethics	1

St: refers to students

To sum up, student and teachers’ responses, accepting that sample size may have been significant in what appears to have been a failure to differentiate responses, further analysis by gender and age has been shelved at this stage in the study. Although we can infer that students and teacher responses differ in some but are similar in other ways, we have no actual evidence that the themes mentioned by teacher and student respondents differ significantly so that conclusions can be drawn and generalizations be made. This could probably be the fact that both study group groups come from the same cultural and educational background.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sample size is recognized as a substantial barrier to meaningful quantitative interpretation of the data from this study to this point. While analysis suggests little significant in difference perceptions between the participants, teachers and students, some minor differences are evident though and these suggest that there may be issues teachers need to think of. One of these could be the top theme of kindness and behavior. Probably this means that there is a need of building closer relationships with students, considering their age. For example, talking to individuals who at certain points might face various life experiences which could have an impact on their motivation and success.

On the other hand, qualitative results establish a positive student attitude toward the classroom management and innovative teaching. This attitudinal difference is derived from the content analysis of sample students’ reflections, related to motivation, and learner types.

Despite the apparent lack of major difference between the two groups of participants, and themes examined in this preliminary study, the similarity of the quantitative findings with earlier studies suggests that a more finely developed instrument and a larger sample are required. More interestingly, perhaps, the similarities between learners with demonstrably differing learning styles suggests that selective use of particularly designed learning resources may offer significant advantages to those students. In either case, it seems clear, a more extended study with a larger sample is required.

In conclusion, future research in this area needs to address the potential for quasi-experimental and mixed methodological research designs conducted over an extended period of time and with a larger sample to confirm

factors potentially affecting the inter-relation. The aspects identified in this paper seem likely to shed light on future pedagogical approaches in Macedonia and in the wider world.

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