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RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Investigation into the Profile of an Effective Language Teacher

Turan Paker · Büşra Duran

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CORRESPONDENCE
Turan Paker
tpaker@gmail.com
Pamukkale University, Faculty of Education, Denizli, Turkey.

AUTHOR DETAILS
Additional information about the authors is available at the end of the article.

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ABSTRACT

Background/purpose – Teachers have a pivotal role for the academic success of learners both in and out of the classroom. In this study, we attempt to identify the characteristics of effective teachers from the perspective of preservice English language teachers. With this aim, the personal characteristics, professional skills, and academic qualities of effective language teachers, as perceived by candidate teachers, were delineated.

Materials/methods – The research adopted was the mixed-method approach with the explanatory sequential design, through which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in order to gain a better understanding, and to seek to obtain more comprehensive results. The study's participants were 75 junior and senior students studying in the Department of English Language Teaching of a state university. The data were collected through the application of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive analysis; with mean, standard deviation, and percentage values and qualitative transcribed interview data analyzed through content analysis with themes and codes.

Results – The findings revealed that there were critical personal qualities for the effectiveness of language teachers such as treating all students equally and fairly, being motivating, being respectful, and being open-minded. Additionally, the most important professional qualities were changing the teaching style in accordance with the target students' proficiency level, making use of various audio-visual materials and technological devices, being effective at classroom management, and knowing how to assess students through the four skills areas of language learning. The participants also highlighted their language fluency according to competence in the four language skills areas and having intelligible pronunciation as critical academic qualities for effective English teachers.

Conclusion – According to preservice English language teachers, the study's overall results indicated that the personal characteristics of English teachers were more appreciated than their professional or academic qualities in terms of their effectiveness.

Keywords – effective language teachers, teacher characteristics, teaching quality, perception of student teachers, English language teacher.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers are integral to education as a whole and therefore play a pivotal role in the academic success of learners, both in and out of the classroom. There is virtually no other profession like teaching in that being a teacher means to enlighten learners and future adults, and to help them realize their own potential. Teachers help to shape individuals, and thereby shape society (Gönenç-Afyon, 2005). Some teachers affect learners' lives, leaving a lifelong impact on them. At this point, the critical questions are "Who are these 'some' teachers?" and "Which characteristics of teachers are the most influential for learners?"

Researchers have investigated the qualities of effective language teachers as a popular topic with various participants; for instance, young learners, parents, high school students, as well as preservice and inservice teachers in various contexts (e.g., Brosh, 1996; Doğan, 2009; Kourieos & Evripidou, 2013; Önem, 2009; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009). According to the findings of these studies, certain common features make some language teachers more effective than others, such as being friendly and approachable, having a sense of humor, using different materials, speaking the target non-native language fluently (e.g., English) and being effective in their classroom management. Effectiveness is the measure of success in almost any field. Whilst the concept of "effectiveness" is used in many different areas; when applied to teachers, it becomes a bit of a gray area (Yılmaz, 2011). It cannot be defined only as "teaching well." According to Brown and Atkins (1988), effectiveness relates to a teacher's own goals of teaching since contexts are different, and therefore what counts as effective in one condition may be ineffective in another. There may also be numerous variables in play in various teaching contexts; therefore, it is hard to define what teacher effectiveness actually is and also how it may be measured.

Dunkin (1997) defined teacher effectiveness as "a matter of the degree to which a teacher achieves desired effects upon students" (p. xx) and emphasized that teacher competence, teacher performance, and teacher effectiveness are three dimensions that can be used to judge teachers. Additionally, Hunt (2009) defined teacher effectiveness as the qualities and behaviors which help their students to achieve both inside and outside of the classroom.

On the other hand, as a result of the literature seeking answers to the question "Who is an effective teacher?," there are a number of approaches. To measure teacher effectiveness, researchers used standardized tests in early studies; however, more recent studies have aimed to investigate their effectiveness according to their students' perceptions (Önem, 2009). Ramsden (2003) described "a good teacher" as one who is open to learning from their students and who has respect for them, as well as utilizing various appropriate methods of assessment. Duta et al. (2015) identified effective teachers as those with professionalism, fluency in writing and speaking, charisma, honesty, gentleness, and also patience. Effective teachers are those who know the ways in which their students learn, the correct teaching methods, and have appropriate field knowledge (Brown & Atkins, 1993).

Yılmaz (2011) also aimed to explore the qualities of effective teachers. The findings of his study revealed that effective teachers are warm, kind, friendly, cheerful, compassionate, fair, empathetic, enthusiastic, and patient in their role as teachers. In addition, good teachers should aim to help motivate their students to learn, know their subject matter, and be able to use voice tonality and physical gestures effectively. According to Michailidisi and Koutsoulis (2003), an effective teacher should have human characteristics such as understanding and friendliness, communication characteristics such as being able to hold good relations with

learners, and teaching characteristics that include employing the most appropriate methods of teaching.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Distinctiveness of Language Teachers

Although qualities that make teachers effective are similar for all teachers in general, effective language teachers have a number of distinctive characteristics. Bell (2005) pointed out that effective teacher behaviors are not, however, discipline-specific; and that certain behaviors are indeed unique to teachers of foreign languages. Therefore, it may be said that certain characteristics are discipline-independent, whilst others are uniquely applicable to certain professions (Lee, 2010). Hammadou and Bernhardt (1987) referred to this difference as "the unique art of being a foreign language teacher". They argued that this uniqueness is inherently due to the subject matter of foreign language teaching itself. They also emphasized that "in foreign language teaching, the content and the process for learning the content are the same. In other words, in foreign language teaching, the medium is the message" (p. 302).

Lee (2010) published a study on the discipline-specific characteristics of those who teach English as a foreign language (hereafter, "EFL"), and revealed four dimensions unique to language teachers: (1) Subject matter is complex as the medium and message are the same; (2) content includes both linguistic skills and cultural knowledge; (3) good EFL teaching requires student participation and effective error correction; and, (4) being positive towards learners and the subject is important. To summarize, complexity of subject matter, content and teaching approach, and teachers' personality are particular to language teaching.

Studies on the Profile of Effective Language Teachers

The literature shows a number of studies which have attempted to reveal effective language teacher characteristics, both by different researchers in Turkey and in other countries. For instance, Gönenç-Afyon (2005) studied the ideal English teacher's profile from the perspective of the students and what their expectations were from a language teacher. The findings indicated that students from three different settings formed a consensus regarding the ideal characteristics and inappropriate features of language teachers. Subject matter expertise, experience in the field, good looking, being cheerful, and honesty were said to be among the qualities of an ideal English language teacher.

Park and Lee (2006) also investigated the characteristics of effective English teachers through a self-report type of questionnaire which consisted of three categories; English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills. The results of their study demonstrated that teachers and students had significantly different perceptions across all three categories. The students considered pedagogical knowledge as the most important feature, whilst the teachers ranked English proficiency the highest. Moreover, the beliefs of the student subgroups were different, with female and male students reporting different characteristics in terms of teachers' socio-affective skills; whereas, high achieving and low achieving students held different perceptions again in terms of the pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills of effective English language teachers.

In another study, Arıkan et al. (2008) investigated students' perceptions of an effective teacher, and suggested that they should be fair, creative, young, humorous, friendly, and a Turkish native speaker (even though the target language was English). In addition, creating a stress-free environment in the classroom, using correct pronunciation, and teaching both formal and informal English were amongst the most important qualities identified by the student participants. On the other hand, they also pointed out that gender, experience, and

being authoritative were less important when it came to being an efficient language teacher. Similarly, Önem (2009) attempted to explore the characteristics of a good language teacher, and concluded that all aspects of good teaching were considered significant by both instructors and students. Çubukçu (2010) conducted a similar study and concluded that affection, preparedness, fairness, consistency in applying the rules, enthusiasm, and holding a positive relationship with students as being key.

Chen (2012) surveyed what were the favorable and unfavorable qualities of EFL teachers. The study's findings revealed that students gave importance to personal characteristics of teachers, including fairness, kindness, sense of humor, temper, and patience. The students also emphasized the importance of skills and techniques when it came to lesson delivery and being able to speak both Thai (as the students' native language) and English (the target language) during teaching. In addition, Koç (2013) investigated the perceptions of elementary, secondary, and high school students on what made a good foreign (English) language teacher. According to the students, a good English teacher is one who is kind and patient, teaches well, has correct pronunciation, is seen as an equal by learners, and has a good relationship with them. The results also revealed that elementary students expected songs and games, whilst high school students preferred vocabulary drills and translation activities.

Çelik et al. (2013) attempted to define successful language teacher characteristics in terms of classroom behaviors, pedagogic knowledge, personal qualities, and professional skills. With this aim, 998 undergraduate students enrolled at a state university in Turkey completed a survey. The respondents noted certain qualities as being the most important; teaching the four skills effectively, being successful in classroom management, using the Turkish language while making explanations, being competent in the field, and showing enthusiasm.

In a study aimed at presenting the characteristics of successful English teachers, Demiröz and Yeşilyurt (2015) had 212 English Language Teaching (ELT) students and 192 English Language and Literature students as participants. The study's results revealed that the ELT students described the more successful teachers as those who gave meaningful tasks, spoke the target foreign language fluently, know the culture of the target language (TL), and were able to correct mistakes gently. As for the English Language and Literature students, they believed that an effective language teacher should provide grammar-focused activities and lessons.

Similarly, Mutlu-Kesen and Özkan (2017) tried to explore the perceptions of 220 freshman ELT students towards the key characteristics of qualified language teachers. Students' paragraphs and semi-structured interviews were used as a means of data collection. The participants described the traits of an effective English teacher as follows: being friendly, humanist and forgiving, being tolerant, fair and open-minded, helping students, having authority in the classroom, knowledge of the English culture, and being creative, intelligent, and enthusiastic. On the other hand, Külekçi (2018) surveyed ELT students' concepts of an ideal EFL teacher at a state university in İzmir, Turkey. Data were gathered by applying a questionnaire to 165 students and semi-structured interviews conducted with eight students. According to the findings, the five essential qualities of an ideal language teacher were using teaching materials, being clear, giving importance to self-improvement, preparedness, and providing communicative tasks.

Finally, with a sample of 192 ELT students from two state universities in Turkey, Çakmak and Gündüz (2018) conducted a research study on the quality of language teachers,

with qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews and a survey. The results revealed that being consistent, objective, and competent were the most essential qualities, according to the prospective teachers. They also underlined the necessity of being prepared for the classes, providing a positive classroom environment, and successful classroom management.

Research Goal

The purpose of the current study was to reveal the beliefs and perceptions of future language teachers about effective EFL teacher effectiveness. Therefore, this study sought answers to the following research question and its subcomponents:

1. What are prospective foreign language teachers' perceptions about effective language teacher qualities?
2. Which personal/interpersonal qualities should effective foreign language teachers have according to prospective language teachers?
3. Which professional and pedagogic skills should effective foreign language teachers have according to prospective language teachers?
4. Which English proficiency or academic quality should effective foreign language teachers have according to prospective language teachers?

3. METHODOLOGY

Regarding the aim of the current study, both quantitative and qualitative data were needed in order to gain a better understanding and to obtain results that would be more generalizable. For this reason, a mixed-method research design was employed. According to Creswell (2014), the mixed-method design is a research technique in which both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed in order to gain a better understanding of the research problem. For the current study, the explanatory sequential design was applied.

Participants and Data Collection

The participants of the current study were 75 senior and junior students of an ELT department at a state university in Turkey. The number of participant junior students was 30, whilst there were 45 seniors. Their ages ranged between 20 and 34 years old. The number of female participants was 55, whilst there were 20 male participants. Two different instruments were used to collect the study's data; a questionnaire developed by the researchers and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was formed as a Likert-type scale, where students could respond to items as *strongly agree*, *agree*, *partly agree*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*. The scale consisted of 62 items within three categories: Personal/interpersonal qualities (Items 1-26); Professional/pedagogic skills (Items 27-54); and, English proficiency/academic quality (Items 55-62). Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants, which were audio-recorded with the consent of each interviewee. The interview questions were as follows;

1. Have you ever had a foreign language teacher whom you could define as effective? Which qualities made them effective?
2. What are the most important and critical features or qualities of an effective foreign language teacher?
3. Which characteristics should foreign language teachers not possess?
4. Do you believe that you will be an effective English language teacher? At this point, has the ELT department contributed to your professional growth?

Data Analysis

In order to describe the opinions of the participants, the quantitative data were

analyzed through descriptive analysis, with mean, standard deviation, and percentage values. Additionally, independent *t*-test was used in order to calculate whether or not there was any difference on the perception of effective language teacher characteristics according to the participants' gender, and whether or not their perceptions of an effective English teacher differed with reference to their academic grades as student English teachers. In addition, the participant interviews were audio-recorded and then subsequently transcribed. Content analysis was then applied to reveal themes and codes from the qualitative data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research question of the study aimed to investigate English teacher candidates' perspectives about the characteristics of an effective language teacher in terms of three subcategories; personal/interpersonal characteristics, professional/pedagogic skills, and English proficiency/academic qualities. The findings revealed that personal and interpersonal qualities of language teachers received the highest mean score among the three subcategories. Personal and interpersonal characteristics of effective English teachers were prioritized by the participant student teachers as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Values of Subcategories

Subcategories	*M*	*SD*
Personal / interpersonal qualities	4.90	0.41
Professional / pedagogic skills	4.85	0.34
English proficiency / academic quality	4.69	0.35

N = 75

Similarly, the majority of participant student teachers focused on the personal characteristics of teachers rather than academic qualities whilst discussing the critical aspects of effective English teachers in their interviews. This finding may be attributed to the sentiment of the Turkish students, as it is known culturally that they have a general interest in English, as well as any other course where they appreciate their teacher. According to Chuah (2009), East-Asian students who depend on their parents at home are more reliant on their teachers at school compared to western learners. The finding of the current study can also be said to be in line with those of Önem (2009) and Chen (2012), who found that personal characteristics were considered the most important by the participants of their respective studies. On the other hand, the current study's finding was inconsistent with the study by Park and Lee (2006), who concluded that professional knowledge and English proficiency was the most significant category.

Personal/interpersonal characteristics of effective teachers

As shown in Table 2, *being aware of teacher responsibilities* and *treating all students equally and fairly* gained the highest mean and percentage scores. The mean score for both these items (12 and 10) were 4.91, with 98.7% of the participants agreeing that an effective language teacher should be aware of their responsibilities and treat all students equally and fairly. According to the findings, the candidate English teachers perceived these items as the most important personal qualities. In the interviews, some of the participants also used supportive expressions on the subject of responsibility;

P20. *Teachers should take responsibility for their teaching; they should always think about how they can teach better and to improve themselves as a professional.*

P10. *Teachers should not be irresponsible in their job, nor about its requirements.*

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Top-Rated Items on Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics

Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics An effective teacher…	*M*	*SD*	*SA*%	*A*%	*PA*%	*D*%	*SD*%
• treats all students equally and fairly (12)	4.91	0.34	92.00	6.70	1.30	0.00	0.00
• is aware of teacher responsibilities (10)	4.91	0.34	92.00	6.70	1.30	0.00	0.00
• is motivating (15)	4.89	0.35	90.70	8.00	1.30	0.00	0.00
• is polite and respectful (25)	4.85	0.36	85.30	14.70	0.00	0.00	0.00
• is open-minded (6)	4.84	0.37	81.80	15.60	0.00	0.00	0.00
• is honest and reliable (4)	4.80	0.49	81.80	11.70	3.90	0.00	0.00
• is self-confident (26)	4.80	0.46	82.70	14.70	2.70	0.00	0.00
• is creative (5)	4.80	0.43	79.20	16.90	1.30	1.30	1.30
• is caring and empathetic (2)	4.79	0.44	77.90	18.20	1.30	1.30	1.30
• is patient and humanistic towards learners (3)	4.77	0.51	79.20	14.30	3.90	1.30	1.30
• is encouraging (19)	4.75	0.44	74.70	25.30	0.00	0.00	0.00
• is open to criticism (13)	4.73	0.47	74.70	24.00	1.30	0.00	0.00
• is energetic and lively (22)	4.67	0.55	70.70	25.30	4.00	0.00	0.00

N = 75

These results showed similarities with the study of Arıkan et al. (2008), who found treating students fairly as one of the most important qualities in their study conducted with 100 preparatory students from two state universities located in Ankara, Turkey.

Another important characteristic identified in the current study's results was *being motivating* (Item 15). During the participant interviews, some valued the importance of being motivating for an effective language teacher profile.

> P5. *The most critical point is that teachers should love language and language teaching, and they should motivate students to learn.*
>
> P6. *Teachers must motivate learners to use the language and speak in English during lessons.*
>
> P17. *English teachers should motivate students, and they themselves must be motivated.*

This result can be said to be in line with the related literature. Brosh (1996) revealed being motivating as one of the five desirable characteristics of an effective language teacher. In addition, the participants also agreed that language teachers should be polite and respectful. According to Hunt (2009), respecting learners is considered a measure of teacher effectiveness.

In addition, the current study's participants considered that *being polite* (Item 15) and *respectful* (Item 25) were a necessity for effective teachers. The mean scores for these two items were 4.91 and 4.85, respectively. *Being open-minded* (Item 6) was also described as one of the most essential qualities by the majority of the prospective language teachers (*M* = 4.84, *SD* = 0.37). It is also important to note here that none of the respondents disagreed with these items. *Being open-minded* was also highlighted in the participant interviews.

> P2. *They should not be narrow-minded. Being open to changes is important for language teachers.*
>
> P7. *I think that a language teacher should not be narrow-minded. They must have a broad world view and perspective. Additionally, they should not be impatient.*

P4. *Teachers should not be narrow-minded, but open to innovation and new developments. Also, they should be less strict and authoritative. They should not depend on traditional structure-based methods of teaching.*

This result is in agreement with the findings of Kourieos and Evripidou (2013), who aimed to describe the teaching behaviors and characteristics of effective EFL instructors in the Republic of Cyprus with 110 undergraduate students from different academic disciplines. The results showed that the students considered that an EFL teacher must be open-minded; a trait that was also highlighted by the participants of the current study.

As indicated in Table 2, significant importance was attached to *being creative* (Item 5), with a mean score of 4.80. *Being creative* was also found to be one of the critical aspects of language teachers according to the participants' interviews.

P4. *I expect English teachers to be creative; that is a must.*

P3. *I think teachers should be creative in terms of preparing different materials and using them effectively in lessons.*

Next, *being honest and reliable* (Item 4, M = 4.80, SD = 0.49) and *being self-confident* (Item 26, M = 4.80, SD = 0.46) were also seen as important features for effective language teachers, as was *being caring and empathetic* (Item 2, M = 4.79, SD = 0.44). In the interviews, the participants were asked to think about and describe the best language teacher they had experienced to date, and they mostly recalled teachers they had encountered who were caring.

P18. *I had an English teacher at high school. She was so caring and attentive, and looked out for us personally. Moreover, we are still in contact. I think I passed the university exam and graduated from university thanks to her support, which was very important to me.*

P9. *I had one teacher who I would consider effective. In fact, she was my role model, and I decided to become an English teacher thanks to her and her support. She was successful and always smiling and helpful. When she looked into her students' eyes, she could see their personal problems and always dealt with these problems individually. She could see and understand the emotional state of each student.*

P8. *We had a teacher. Whilst he was behavioristic; he was also really effective. We enjoyed attending his classes, as seeing students learning a topic was always so important to him. If a student was not learning anything, he would try to teach them one-to-one as a tutorial. He was caring and always dealt with our learning problems.*

When the interviewees were asked about the critical qualities for teachers' effectiveness, some of the ELT students focused on the necessity of being caring and supportive towards learners. The following excerpts exemplify this.

P4. *English teachers must be empathetic, they should be sensitive to the language learning process that students should follow.*

P21. *To me, a language teacher should be lovely and sincere. Since learning a language is already a difficult process, the teacher should be appealing in how they teach. Students will enjoy their lessons more and learn more easily if they like the teacher.*

P18. *I think not only English teachers, but also all teachers should teach with entertaining activities. If a teacher is a serious and studious type, then students will be unlikely to appreciate them. It is not effective. However, if a teacher includes plays, games, and songs, then they can be seen as a more effective teacher. In addition, teachers should be empathetic; if not, many things they do will be in vain.*

Furthermore, *being patient and humanistic* (Item 3, *M* = 4.77, *SD* = 0.51), *encouraging* (Item 19, *M* = 4.75, *SD* = 0.44), and *open to criticism* (Item 13, *M* = 4.73, *SD* = 0.47) were mentioned by the prospective English teachers as other important personal qualities for effective language teachers. According to both the quantitative and qualitative findings, *being energetic and lively* (Item 22, *M* = 4.67, *SD* = 0.55) was seen as one of the critical aspects.

P3. *English teachers should not be quiet and lethargic. They should be active and lively, else their lessons will seem monotonous.*

P16. *English teachers cannot teach by standing still. They should find alternative ways of teaching. Our English teacher at secondary school was so energetic and active during lessons; she was always teaching vocabulary through demonstration. It was enjoyable for me, and as a student I liked that.*

P20. *Language teachers should certainly be active with their students; they should be lively and move around in class. My teacher at primary school was so active, energetic, and lively. I still remember him.*

P12. *They must be lively, especially when working with young learners. Children can get bored easily, so their teachers should be able to change the class activities according to the required pedagogical features. I also want to work with children and to put my theoretical learning into practice.*

P15. *Teaching languages is different from other lessons, and English language teachers should be able to use body language, gestures, and mimics effectively. They should also use demonstration, as language cannot be taught without movement or by being passive. I had a teacher who was so energetic, lively, and always moving about during classes. He also varied his tone of voice when teaching. Also, he was so intellectual.*

The participants described the following characteristics as medium-rated qualities of effective teachers in terms of their personal and interpersonal characteristics. These qualities are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Medium-Rated Items on Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics

Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics An effective teacher…	*M*	*SD*	*SA%*	*A%*	*PA%*	*D%*	*SD%*
• is reflective (24)	4.64	0.54	66.70	30.70	2.70	0.00	0.00
• is punctual (in terms of starting the class and papers) (23)	4.57	0.62	64.00	29.30	6.70	0.00	000
• is smiling and cheerful (9)	4.57	0.62	64.00	29.30	6.70	0.00	0.00
• has a sense of humor (14)	4.56	0.62	62.70	30.70	6.70	0.00	0.00
• has a friendly attitude (7)	4.48	0.60	51.90	40.30	5.20	0.00	0.00
• is familiar with the native speakers' culture(11)	4.48	0.84	65.30	21.30	10.70	1.30	1.30
• is accessible to learners outside the class (8)	4.29	0.82	45.50	39.00	10.40	1.30	1.30
• is neat and tidy in their appearance (20)	4.23	0.92	48.00	33.30	13.30	4.00	1.30
• is disciplined (21)	4.20	0.82	40.00	44.00	13.30	1.30	1.30

N = 75

According to the results, *being reflective* (Item 24, *M* = 4.64, *SD* = 0.54), *being punctual* (Item 23, *M* = 4.57, *SD* = 0.62), and *being smiling and cheerful* (Item 9, *M* = 4.57, *SD* = 0.62) were also considered to be of importance to the participants. In their interviews, some of the participants believed that language teachers should be smiling rather than serious. The following comments reflected some of the participants' beliefs.

P16. *A language teacher should be smiling, and should not teach reluctantly as the students will not learn much otherwise. They should be aware of the characteristics of their learner group and be energetic and not stay sat in their chair. Language teaching is impossible in this way.*

P4. *English teachers must be smiling and full of positive energy.*

P17. *A language teacher should not come across as overly serious. This can create a learning barrier for students. Teachers must be smiling.*

Having a friendly attitude (Item *7*, *M* = 4.48, *SD* = 0.60) was regarded as important, and some participants valued the importance of friendly attitude and good rapport between students and teacher. The following excerpts exemplify these points.

P11. *As a critical feature, a teacher should have establish a good relationship with their students. As teachers of language, communication with students is important. A teacher must know how to have good rapport with learners.*

P10. *An effective language teacher should have a good rapport with their students; this is critical.*

P14. *Teachers should have a good relationship with their students. They should possess background knowledge on their students and behave according to their individual characteristics.*

P3. *They should have strong communication skills with children, and be able to instill special interest in their learners.*

P6. *We had an English teacher at primary school. She had a friendly attitude and was really lovely. She was like a member of the family. She encouraged and motivated us to speak in the target language; but never corrected us immediately. Grammar was seemingly less important to her; she valued communication.*

However, *being accessible for learners outside the class* (Item 8, *M* = 4.29, *SD* = 0.82), *being neat and tidy in appearance* (Item 20, *M* = 4.23, *SD* = 0.92), and *being disciplined* (Item 21, *M* = 4.20, *SD* = 0.82) were also perceived as important features of an effective English teacher by the participant ELT students. Additionally, *being experienced* (Item 17, *M* = 3.79, *SD* = 0.92) and *being young* (Item 16, *M* = 3.28, *SD* = 1.07) were moderately valued by the participants, with these qualities deemed to be of less importance compared to the previous items.

The participants described the following characteristics as low-rated qualities with regards to the personal and interpersonal characteristics of an effective teacher. The qualities identified are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Low-Rated Items on Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics

Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics An effective teacher…	*M*	*SD*	*SA%*	*A%*	*PA%*	*D%*	*SD%*
• is experienced (17)	3.79	0.92	25.30	34.70	34.70	4.00	1.30
• is young (16)	3.28	1.07	16.00	21.30	42.70	14.70	5.30
• is strict (1)	2.73	0.74	1.30	7.80	57.10	26.00	5.20
• has lived in an English-speaking country (18)	2.43	1.02	2.70	10.70	33.30	33.30	20.00

N = 75

As for the qualities with the lowest mean scores, *being strict* (Item 1, *M* = 2.73, *SD* = 0.74) was not considered important or necessary. Finally, *having lived in an English-speaking country* (Item 18, *M* = 2.43, *SD* = 1.02) was considered an insignificant trait for being an effective language teacher. This item had the lowest mean score of all personal qualities. The participants clearly did not perceive this as an important quality in terms of an English teacher's effectiveness. This finding echoed the result of a study conducted by Baytur and Razı (2015) with 50 high school and 50 secondary school students in Çanakkale, Turkey. Gönenç-Afyon (2005) also researched the ideal English language teacher's profile from the perspectives of 261 students, and highlighted their expectations from a language teacher. She stated that having lived in an English-speaking country was not something of concern to her study's participants in terms of an English language teacher's effectiveness.

Although there are parallels to be drawn from the current study and the literature, some studies have reached opposing conclusions. For example, *being friendly* was not considered a top characteristic in the current study; however, Mutlu-Kesen and Özkan (2017) indicated that being friendly was a key characteristic of a qualified language teacher. In addition, Leon (2018) reported that fairness was the least significant quality, whereas it was seen as the most important personal characteristic in the current study.

Professional/pedagogic skills of effective teachers

The second subcategory in the current study related to the professional and pedagogic skills of foreign language teachers. As the data demonstrated, effective foreign language teachers change their teaching style in accordance with their students' proficiency level, utilize various audio-visual materials and technological devices, are competent at classroom management, and have the appropriate know-how to evaluate their students (see Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Top-Rated Items on Professional and Pedagogical Skills

Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics An effective teacher…	*M*	*SD*	*SA%*	*A%*	*PA%*	*D%*	*SD%*
• changes teaching style in accordance with students' proficiency levels (18)	4.85	0.42	88.00	9.30	2.70	0.00	0.00
• uses various audio-visual materials and technological devices (4)	4.81	0.39	81.30	18.70	0.00	0.00	0.00
• is good at classroom management (22)	4.80	0.43	81.30	17.30	1.30	0.00	0.00
• knows how to evaluate students (7)	4.80	0.49	81.80	11.70	3.90	1.30	1.30
• is prepared for each class (1)	4.78	0.41	76.60	20.80	0.00	0.00	0.00
• takes into account learner differences (e.g. different learning styles) (3)	4.78	0.47	79.20	15.60	2.60	1.30	1.30
• is ready to learn new methods and teaching strategies (27)	4.78	0.44	80.00	18.70	1.30	0.00	0.00

• provides a stress-free classroom environment (12)	4.74	0.49	77.30	20.00	2.70	0.00	0.00
• helps students feel confident while learning TL (2)	4.74	0.57	77.90	15.60	2.60	0.00	0.00
• stimulates interaction, cooperation and teamwork in the classroom (6)	4.72	0.53	76.00	20.00	4.00	0.00	0.00
• is up-to-date (26)	4.70	0.51	73.30	24.00	2.70	0.00	0.00

N = 75

As the data attested, *being able to change teaching style in accordance with students' proficiency levels* (Item 18) had the highest agreement level and percentage (*M* = 4.85, *SD* = 0.42). There are many methods and techniques in language teaching; however, teachers cannot apply all methods for all learners everywhere; teaching may be contextual. Language teachers should use different methods and evaluate what is working and what is not within their own teaching context. They may need to make some changes by taking into account proficiency levels of their own learners in order to teach language effectively. Considering this situation, prospective language teachers must have viewed this item as foremost professional quality for an effective English teacher.

Another quality which was perceived by the respondents as being critical for English language teachers to be effective was *using various audio-visual materials and technological devices* (Item 4, *M* = 4.81, *SD* = 0.39). All of the participants concurred in the necessity of using different materials and devices in language teaching. In Turkey, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has gained importance and has been applied officially in recent years; therefore, it is considered a valid matter of priority in the context of the current study. Accordingly, language teachers need technology and technological aids in order to facilitate foreign language learning in a communicative way. Likewise, one of the most frequently emphasized issues in the students' interviews was the use of different activities and authentic materials. The ELT students talked about their past experiences and most significantly valued activities, songs, and materials which were used in what they considered to be effective language teaching and learning. The following are some of the comments made by the interviewed participants related to this point:

> P2. *I remember my English teacher in high school. She was following the popular TV series and music of the day and would refer to them in our class, which helped keep us interested. Utilizing various activities was important.*
>
> P12. *I had an English teacher in my middle school whose lessons were so memorable. For example, she would bring in different clothes in order to teach us vocabulary about clothing. I still remember her; but, in high school I did not have an effective teacher, as they only focused on grammar and exam-based items.*
>
> P19. *We had an English teacher in high school who was so devoted. He used various methods and techniques, which I have learned about in this department. He taught with songs and music, too.*
>
> P21. *Using only textbooks can be ineffective. Students do not enjoy doing homework and should not be used. Instead, songs, games, and other different activities could be used. Teachers should not be strict about sticking to just one method.*

The participants also agreed on the requirement of *knowing how to evaluate students* and *being good at classroom management* (Item 22) with a mean score of 4.80 for both items. Assessment and evaluation play an important role in education; thus, an effective language teacher should know and be able to apply appropriate techniques to assess

learners' progress in terms of the four language skills based on their respective levels in order to avoid the negative washback effect (Paker, 2013). On the other hand, classroom management is a very serious issue, especially in the Turkish context. Classrooms can be very complex environments with students often coming from significantly different cultural backgrounds, and situations such as writing, interacting, reading, raising hands, and talking are commonplace, so it is not easy for teachers to cope, manage the situation successfully, and still teach classes effectively. With regard to this, the participants emphasized the importance of classroom management. These professional qualities have also been reported as important in the literature. For example, Önem (2009) investigated the characteristics of good language teachers with 300 preparatory students and 56 instructors from Erciyes University, in Kayseri, Turkey. The study found that the mostly valued teaching qualities were changing teaching style according to students' proficiency levels, making use of audio-visual materials, giving equal importance to improve the four language skills, and also sparing time to teach important sentence patterns. Parallel to these findings, Çelik et al. (2013) defined successful language teacher characteristics in terms of classroom behaviors, pedagogic knowledge, personal qualities, and professional skills with 998 undergraduate students from a Turkish state university. According to their findings, the most prominent qualities were being good at classroom management, using technology and visual materials well, and teaching the four skills of language learning effectively.

Furthermore, the current study's results revealed that *being prepared for each class* (Item 1), *taking into account learner differences* (Item 3), and *being ready to learn new methods* (Item 27) were vital professional qualities, according to the participant ELT students. The mean score of the these three items was 4.78. Preparation prior to classes may also be beneficial for teachers in that they can more easily manage and overcome problems, feel more self-confident, and are less likely to feel "lost" during the lesson. The second item, which is about considering learner differences, is also one of the fundamental issues in English language teaching. Students all learn in their own different ways; thus, language teachers should accommodate all types of learning styles and individual differences in their teaching. On the other hand, being open to learning new methods was seen as valuable by the prospective teachers. However, whilst some experienced teachers may not be willing to learn alternative or newer methods in ELT, both novice and experienced teachers do actually need to learn and practice new methodologies in their classrooms in order for them to be effective teachers.

Another professional skill on which the majority of the student teachers agreed were *helping students feel confident while learning TL* (Item 2) and *providing a stress-free environment* (Item 12). The mean score for both these items was 4.74. These items may be interrelated since students will feel secure and confident in a stress-free class atmosphere, where students and teachers will probably develop a good rapport and which enhances the target language learning process.

As can be seen from Table 3, *stimulating interaction, cooperation and teamwork in the classroom* (Item 6, $M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.53$) plays an important role in effective language teaching, according to the perceptions of preservice English teachers. According to Brown (2001), a good language teacher should have the pedagogical skill of stimulating cooperation and interaction. In addition, *being up-to-date such as the Internet and recent technologies used in teaching* (Item 26, $M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.51$) was also seen as significant by the majority of participants the current study. Our changing world necessitates that teachers, as with all

professions, need to adapt to the latest technologies. In the interviews, the participants also mentioned this quality;

> P9. *First of all, technology is developing constantly, and language teachers should be able to adapt to these changes. They should follow the latest developments, not only in Turkey but also worldwide. They must have adequate technological knowledge. Then, they must be disciplined and hardworking.*
>
> P4. *I think that language teachers should not only use traditional methods, but that they should also be open to changes.*
>
> P11. *Traditional teaching methods should not exist in today's classes at all. Students can be lively and moving about during lessons. They should not be focused on writing in notebooks, but more communicative lessons should be conducted.*

Similarly, *exposing students to real life topics* (Item 10, *M* = 4.69, *SD* = 0.54) and *giving equal importance to improve all four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking)* (Item 17, *M* = 4.69, *SD* = 0.15) were perceived as important professional qualities by most of the respondents. As a necessary professional skill, improving the four language skills of learners was also stressed by those ELT students who were interviewed. They believed that English teachers should not only focus on grammar teaching, but should address all four language skills; reading, writing, listening, and speaking, in order to be effective teachers (see Table 6).

> P6. *A language teacher should encourage learners to speak in the TL, give importance to praxis of the four skills, which is a necessity.*
>
> P7. *I think English teachers should have fluent competence in the four skills and lessons must be conducted according to these four language skills.*
>
> P12. *In my opinion, teaching with integrating the four skills is very important. I studied English by focusing on grammar up until university education. It did not help in improving my listening, speaking, and writing. Teachers must not focus solely on grammar and vocabulary; they should take these four skills into account too.*

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Medium-Rated Items on Professional and Pedagogical Skills

Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics An effective teacher…	*M*	*SD*	*SA%*	*A%*	*PA%*	*D%*	*SD%*
• exposes students to real life topics (10)	4.69	.54	73.30	22.70	4.00	0.00	0.00
• gives equal importance to improve all four skills (17)	4.69	0.51	72.00	25.30	2.70	0.00	0.00
• varies the tone of voice to attract students' attention (16)	4.68	0.49	69.30	29.30	1.30	0.00	0.00
• efficiently designs and executes lesson plans (5)	4.68	0.54	72.00	24.00	4.00	0.00	0.00
• helps foster learner autonomy with relevant tasks (20)	4.65	0.55	69.30	26.70	4.00	0.00	0.00
• values learners' personality in the class (21)	4.62	0.73	72.00	22.70	2.70	1.30	1.30
• sets activities which require students to interact with each other in the TL (13)	4.62	0.80	74.70	18.70	4.00	0.00	2.70
• simplifies language for students (24)	4.62	0.74	73.30	20.00	4.00	1.30	1.30
• is able to provide appropriate error corrections (25)	4.60	0.56	64.00	32.00	4.00	0.00	0.00

Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics An effective teacher…	*M*	*SD*	*SA%*	*A%*	*PA%*	*D%*	*SD%*
• teaches/applies learning strategies to the learners (9)	4.58	0.61	65.30	28.00	6.70	0.00	0.00
• participates in teacher professional growth events such as seminars, workshops, conferences (28)	4.53	0.74	64.00	28.00	6.70	0.00	1.30
• knows students' names (23)	4.46	0.75	58.70	32.00	8.00	0.00	1.30
• uses the target language as the predominant means of classroom communication (11)	4.32	0.75	48.00	37.30	13.30	1.30	0.00
• uses activities which draw learners' attention to specific grammatical features (14)	4.04	1.01	40.00	36.00	13.30	9.30	1.30

N = 75

As illustrated in the results of the data analysis, *efficiently designing and executing lesson plans* (Item 5, *M* = 4.68, *SD* = 0.54)*, varying the tone of voice to attract students' attention* (Item 16, *M* = 4.68, *SD* = 0.49), *helping foster learner autonomy with relevant tasks* (Item 20, *M* = 4.65, *SD* = 0.55), *setting activities which require students to interact with each other in TL* (Item 13, *M* = 4.62, *SD* = 0.80)*, values learners' personality in the class* (Item 21, *M* = 4.62, *SD* = 0.73)*, simplifying language for students* (Item 24, *M* = 4.62, *SD* = 0.74), and *being able to provide appropriate error corrections* (Item 25, *M* = 4.60, *SD* = 0.56) were the professional and pedagogical skills that were seen as significant by most of the study's participants.

On the other hand, some qualifications seemed relatively less important for the participants when compared to others. However, when we look at the mean scores of the items, they scored over 4.00 out of a possible 5.00 (Likert-type scale). These characteristics were *teaching and applying learning strategies to the learners* (Item 9, *M* = 4.58, *SD* = 0.61)*, participating in teacher professional growth events such as seminars, workshops, conferences* (Item 28, *M* = 4.53, *SD* = 0.74)*, knowing students' names* (Item 23, *M* = 4.46, *SD* = 0.75)*, using the TL as the predominant means of classroom communication* (Item 11, *M* = 4.32, *SD* = 0.75)*,* and *using activities which draw learners' attention to specific grammatical features* (Item 14, *M* = 4.04, *SD* = 1.01). It may be interpreted, therefore, that the participants prioritized these items in terms of their own perception. Among these features, giving importance to professional growth was stressed by some of the interviewed ELT students. Teachers have a job that requires constant development, and as such should pursue new knowledge throughout their careers.

> P2. *I think a critical feature for an effective language teacher is self-improvement. They should not say 'I am already a teacher and I'm qualified enough.' They should participate in seminars and different professional training activities for teachers. They must keep themselves up to date.*
>
> P13. *Teachers must regularly improve their language/academic skills and professional teaching skills.*
>
> P19. *Being open to changes and keeping up to date with professional growth is critical for an effective language teacher.*

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Low-Rated Items on Professional and Pedagogical Skills

Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics An effective teacher…	*M*	*SD*	*SA%*	*A%*	*PA%*	*D%*	*SD%*
• follows the textbook and syllabus rigidly (8)	3.09	1.18	16.00	18.70	32.00	25.30	8.00
• corrects students immediately after making grammar a mistake (15)	2.70	1.36	13.30	18.70	16.00	29.30	22.70
• uses mother tongue nearly all the time (19)	1.86	1.05	5.30	1.30	13.30	34.70	45.30

N = 75

Other qualities such as *following the textbook and syllabus rigidly* (Item 8) and *correcting students immediately after making a grammar mistake during communicative activities* (Item 15) were those which the participants did not value as much as the previous items, according to the results. The mean scores for these items were 3.09 and 2.70, respectively. Based on these scores, it may be said that prospective language teachers believed that it was not necessary for English teachers to refer to textbooks or course books verbatim, or to follow the syllabus too strictly. They were also against the idea of immediate correction during in-class activities. The following excerpts from the student teachers' interviews mentioned these points:

> P8. *Using punishment for correcting mistakes is so bad. I had a teacher who was scaffolding when we made mistakes.*
>
> P12. *Language teachers should not make immediate corrections, as this is very demotivating for students. They should be patient since language learning is a difficult process.*
>
> P14. *Teachers should not be critical of students' mistakes. Immediate correction is not the best way.*

Ultimately, *using Turkish nearly all the time* (Item 19) had the lowest mean score (1.86) from the questionnaire. The majority of the respondents strongly disagreed with this idea. We may conclude, therefore, that effective foreign language teachers should avoid overuse of the native language, according to the perceptions of the participant preservice English teachers. In a similar vein, some of the interviewees expressed their opinions as follows:

> P1. *English teachers should not speak Turkish during lessons.*
>
> P18. *Speaking in our native language is not effective. Teachers should communicate using the target language. They can use demonstration.*
>
> P13. *At high school, we had a teacher who always spoke in English during classes. It was so effective and important.*

English proficiency of effective teachers

The last subcategory concerned the English proficiency and academic qualities of language teachers. As the results of the study revealed, an effective English language teacher should have fluent competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English, and also have accurate and clear pronunciation (see Table 8).

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for English Proficiency

Personal/Interpersonal Characteristics An effective teacher…	*M*	*SD*	*SA%*	*A%*	*PA%*	*D%*	*SD%*
• has fluent competence in speaking, writing, listening to and reading English (1)	4.69	0.46	69.30	30.70	0.00	0.00	0.00
• has correct and clear pronunciation (6)	4.69	0.49	70.70	28.00	1.30	0.00	0.00
• understands the linguistic systems of English phonology, grammar and discourse (2)	4.64	0.53	66.70	30.70	2.70	0.00	0.00
• has a broad vocabulary in TL (3)	4.57	0.57	61.30	34.70	4.00	0.00	0.00
• is native speaker of Turkish, fluent in English (8)	4.22	1.04	54.70	24.00	13.30	5.30	2.70
• knows British/American culture well (5)	3.76	0.91	23.40	35.10	31.20	7.80	0.00
• has a native-like accent (4)	3.28	0.93	9.30	29.30	45.30	12.00	4.00
• is native speaker of English (7)	2.50	1.14	6.70	12.00	26.70	34.70	20.00

N = 75

With regard to analysis of this section, our results revealed that the most important proficiency qualities of effective language teachers were *teachers' fluent competence of four language skills* (Item 1) and *having correct and clear pronunciation* (Item 6). According to Brown (2001), having fluent competence in the four language skills is one of the most important areas of technical knowledge for good language teachers. In the current study's interviews, two of the participants explained their thoughts on this issue as follows:

> P1. *I had effective English teachers. They used the target language during lessons in a comprehensible way. To me, speaking English in class is the most effective way of teaching a language. Teaching grammar and using our native language does not work.*
>
> P14. *I had some teachers who could speak English fluently. So, they were the more effective teachers for me.*

This finding is in line with the outcomes of Kourieos and Evripidou (2013), in which they concluded that being fluent in the target language played an important role in language teacher effectiveness. Arıkan et al. (2008) also found that having accurate pronunciation was amongst the most desirable characteristics of effective language teachers. In a similar vein, Koç (2013) noted that having good pronunciation was one of the most important qualities of a good language teacher.

The respondents in the current study also seemed to reach a consensus that *understanding the linguistic systems of English phonology, grammar and discourse* (Item 2) was a fundamental requirement for language teachers in terms of their effectiveness. The mean score for the item was 4.64, while the percentage who strongly agreed was 66.7%. Moreover, Brown (2001) noted in his book that a good English teacher should understand and know English linguistic systems well.

The data in the current study also revealed that effective language teachers should *have a broad vocabulary in target language* (Item 3) with a mean score of 4.57. The participants pointed out that vocabulary knowledge is an indispensable proficiency of English language teachers. As for *being native speaker of Turkish* (Item 8) and *knowing British/American culture well* (Item 5), they were less highly valued by the participants;

perhaps considering that a language teacher does not have to know the target language culture that well. The items had low mean scores, with 4.22 and 3.76, respectively.

Finally, the least important two qualities were *having a native-like accent* (Item 4) and *being a native speaker of English* (Item 7). Only 9% of the prospective teachers considered speaking English with a native-like accent as a critical skill, with a calculated mean score of 3.28. On the other hand, *being a native speaker of English* (Item 7) had the lowest mean score (2.50), and recorded a very low 6.7% in terms of those who strongly agreed. It can be inferred from these two results that being a native speaker or speaking with a native-like accent may not directly relate to teaching English effectively, according to the participant preservice language teachers; that is to say, they were not among the priorities highlighted in terms of the criteria for effective language teachers.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to reveal prospective English language teachers' perceptions on the characteristics of effective language teachers in terms of personal/interpersonal qualities, professional/pedagogic skills, and English proficiency/academic qualities of teachers. Overall, the findings revealed that the personal qualities of English teachers were more valued than either their professional or academic qualities. The findings revealed that the top personal qualities of effective language teachers were perceived by the participant prospective English teachers as; treating all students equally and fairly, being motivating, being respectful, and being open-minded. In addition, critical professional skills were identified as differentiating teaching style and techniques in accordance with students' proficiency levels, using various audio-visual materials and technological devices, being good at classroom management, and knowing how to assess and evaluate student performance. The ELT student teachers also believed that having fluent competence in the four language skill areas and accurate pronunciation were the most important academic qualities of an effective English language teacher.

The overall findings of the current study suggested certain implications for ELT programs and ELT staff, English language teachers, and for teacher candidates. It was revealed that language teaching by referral only to textbooks and the curriculum was inadequate, and that teachers' characteristics were critical to the effectiveness of the teaching process. Teachers should review their own qualities in terms of their effectiveness and continually reevaluate themselves, which leads to increased self-awareness. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness amongst teachers and teacher candidates that they should constantly update their professional and academic knowledge. In this regard, prospective foreign language teachers should remember that the learning process does not end with their graduation, but will continue throughout their professional life as a teacher. ELT staff may encourage student teachers to follow professional journals and to attend seminars, webinars, and symposiums, as well as becoming involved in conducting action research with their colleagues. In addition, both preservice and inservice teachers should be encouraged to attend professional congresses as part of their professional and personal skills' development, so as to promote information sharing and cooperation. Depending on the needs of teachers, departmental staff can help provide training seminars on communication skills in order to promote more effective teachers. Furthermore, on-line training opportunities and face-to-face training seminars may be offered for both inservice English language teachers and also candidate teachers as part of their teacher education activities.

6. SUGGESTIONS

This study was conducted with a limited number of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, and presented the perceptions of a particular group of ELT students. Therefore, the results may not be generalized to all prospective teacher groups. We suggest that further studies could be conducted with more varied groups of participants and within different contexts.

DECLARATIONS

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Turan Paker, PhD, is Professor of English Language Teaching in Pamukkale University, Denizli, Turkey. His main research interests include approaches and methods in English language teaching, second language acquisition, teacher education, and testing in ELT. He has published extensively in international and national journals, and also authored chapters on English language teaching and testing.
Email: tpaker@gmail.com
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3941-3975

Büşra Duran, MA, is a teacher of English in a state school in Turkey. She graduated from the Institute of Educational Sciences of Pamukkale University.
Email: busraduran1991@gmail.com
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0822-0636

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