



A Comparison of the Kosovan and Turkish University Students' Perceptions of an Ideal Language Teacher

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the aim of the research was to find out whether or not there are differences between the perceptions of Kosovan and Turkish University students regarding the ideal language teacher's characteristics. 240 university students studying in the English Language Teaching Departments in Kosovo and Turkey filled in a questionnaire and described the characteristics of an ideal language teacher. First, the students were asked to order their preferences regarding the ideal language teacher in terms of importance. Then, the students answered an open-ending question, describing the characteristics of an ideal language teacher in a paragraph. Results showed that both for Kosovan and Turkish students, qualities of ideal language teachers, considering: knowledge of subject matter, personal qualities, the relationship between students and the teacher -classroom management were considered important. Classroom management was the only quality which Kosovan students gave more importance to compared to the Turkish students.

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1. Introduction

Learning a language successfully can be very challenging; however, in our rapidly changing world that has become smaller with globalization and social media, having the ability to speak two or three languages is a definite advantage. The necessity of learning a foreign language shows itself in every part of our lives; from education to relationships, from travel to health and other sections. Aküzel, (2006) adds that in today's age of communication, there is a constant urgency in learning an additional language apart from our mother tongue for several reasons: get access to vast amount of information, to follow the technological improvements and advancements, to read research in its original language, to get maximum benefit from mass media tools, to improve relations in economy and tourism, and to know different cultures around the world. So when we are learning a foreign language, we usually need a teacher who creates a learning environment, makes the process easier and guides us. With the great need for language teachers, the attributes of effective teachers are important to consider.

In a learning environment, teachers are often the only person with whom the learners have the chance to interact for the development of their language skills. Therefore, we all agree that good and qualified teachers are indivisible pieces of the education and they play an important role in excellent teaching. For that reason, their characteristics and behavior in the classroom have an important role and effect on their learners.

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When we visualize the picture of an ideal teacher, we can see that there are several qualities from different aspects and educational thoughts. As defined by Hightet (1963), a good teacher is someone who makes the lessons engaging, motivates the students, has subject knowledge, respects his/her profession and admires his/her profession and is exciting. According to Helterban (2008), a good teacher is never pleased with his/her teaching skills: he/she always wants to develop and improve themselves and their knowledge and pedagogy continuously. In order to respond correctly to the appropriate level, age, cultural background and grade, good teachers use new techniques, approaches and methods with a combination of their subject knowledge. In 1982, Perrot said that good teachers have good behaviors and real individual relationships, they know the techniques that help the students learn easier and they have subject-matter knowledge. Brown and Atkins (1993) explained that, good teachers know how their learners learn and how to teach. As said by Giard (1977), good teachers create interesting lessons, teach pronunciation, give clear explanations, they are patient and engage the students. Prodromou (1991) presented a more detailed list of characteristics of a good teacher, including: gives good grades, does not push weak learners, plays games and tells jokes. As described by Ornstein and Lasley (2000), a good teacher is someone who performs teaching practices well and has the consciousness as to why he does them well. From the perspectives of students, good teachers are those who are experienced, who know how to teach and who know how learners learn (Perrot, 1982).

According to different studies, defining an ideal language teacher depends on several factors. Age (Levine, 1993); Culture (Oruç, 2007); field of study (Stevenson & Sander, 2002) and university type (Shank et al., 1995). But when we think about the characteristics of a good English language teacher, we can say that an English teacher should have the same characteristics as a good teacher in general. They vary from other teachers regarding the nature of the subject, the relationship between students and language teachers and the methodology.

Considering these studies conducted in order to define characteristics of an effective teacher, we can see that there are four important characteristics. They are:

Socio-Affective Skills: a teacher should have socio-affective skills in order to continue the educational process effectively. This aspect consist of creating calm and comfortable classroom environment, encouraging the students, being excited and ready to teach; raising students' motivation and offering help if the students request (Cheung, 2006; Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009).

Pedagogical Knowledge: in order to do a profession properly, we should have the knowledge of how to do it. As an example, a teacher should have profound knowledge about the processes and methods of teaching and learning, which is considered as pedagogical knowledge in order to follow that process. According to the study of Vélez-Rendón (2002), pedagogical knowledge is all the information teachers have about their subject matter. In addition to that, Aydın et al. (2009) found in their study that according to learners, a teacher should have pedagogical knowledge in order to teach effectively.

Subject-Matter Knowledge: this aspect can be defined as teachers being aware of the things they teach during the class. Aydın et al, (2009) stated that subject matter knowledge is a feature that is used in different stages of educational process, for example: making effective lesson plans, taking the learners' background into consideration, having proficiency in a target language and using it in the lessons. According to the study conducted by Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009), subject matter knowledge is essential in order to be considered as an effective teacher. Teachers will teach better and more effectively and they will get more successful results if they acquire the subject matter knowledge.

Personality characteristics: teachers like other professions, show their individual features in their place of work. Other than subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, in order to teach effectively and have success in their profession, teachers should have some required personal characteristics. Malikow (2006) lists characteristics according to the studies that have been conducted in order to find out what personal qualities an ideal teacher should have, and here are some of the personality characteristics he mentions: an ideal teacher is creative, has a good sense of humor, is

cheerful, demanding and has expectations. There are some other characteristics that can be added to the list of characteristics of an ideal teacher for instance being kind, easy-going and open-minded, positive, tolerant and helpful for students (Cheung, 2006; Inan, 2014; Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009; Werbinska, 2009).

2. Purpose of the Study

Teachers are the most important members in education since they have a significant role in it. What makes them important is their effectiveness in the view of the fact that teaching is a challenging job. When we consider the importance of learning a foreign language and the attitude towards it, we more strongly agree on the necessity of an "effective teacher". Accordingly, this study's aim is to investigate how university level students, particularly freshmen and seniors define the ideal language teacher characteristics; furthermore, it aims to see the difference of perception of an ideal teacher between Kosovan and Turkish university students.

2. Methodology

In this qualitative study, the aim of the research was to find out whether or not there are differences between the perceptions of Kosovan and Turkish University students regarding the ideal language teacher's characteristics. Therefore, a qualitative approach whose main aim is to identify the meaning people have made, their individual behaviour, and experiences (Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) has been conducted.

The main instrument was a questionnaire, with some close and open ended questions. Data analysis has been done through the answers students gave to open-ended questions, content analysis of students open ended questions, particularly through the paragraph they have written on.

2.1. Setting and Participants

The study was carried out at Prishtina University- Faculty of Education, located in Prizren-Kosovo and at Kocaeli University -Faculty of Education, located in Kocaeli-Turkey during the spring semester of 2014-2015 academic year. (B.A program in English Language Teaching is offered by the Department of Foreign Language Education). 240, in total, is the number of students that participated in this study, in which 120 of them were from Kosovo and the other 120 from Turkey. The participants from Kosovo were 60 freshman and 60 senior students. The students' ages vary from 18 to 44 years old. In terms of gender, there were 15 male students and 45 female students from senior classes and 12 male students and 48 female students from freshmen classes. The participants from Turkey were 60 freshman and 60 senior students. According to the study, the students' ages vary from 17 to 45 years old. In terms of gender, there were 15 male students and 45 female students from senior classes and 13 male students and 47 female students from freshman classes.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

First, students were asked to order their preferences of an ideal Language Teacher Characteristics in terms of importance. Students were supposed to give numbers from 1 to 4 to the following characteristics: subject matter knowledge, student-teacher relationship, teacher personality and classroom management. Number 1: very important; 2: important; 3: less important and 4: not very important. These four characteristics were chosen because they were found as important for students and ranked the most in several studies and some researchers (e.g. Brosh, 1996; Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009; Ghasemi and Hashemi, 2011; and Park and Lee 2006) studied teachers' characteristics under those features as well. Second, there is an open format question where the students wrote a paragraph to describe the characteristics of a good language teacher. Analysis of this part was done by content analysis method.

3. Data Analysis and Results

This paper is focusing on the differences in perceptions of how Kosovan and Turkish students see an ideal language teacher. The other important consideration is the comparison of the perceptions

between university freshmen and senior students since freshmen students of the faculty of education are new in their department and have less knowledge about an ideal language teacher in comparison to the seniors that took four years of education in teaching. The analyses of the data reveal that Turkish students and Kosovan students do not show many differences from each other while defining an ideal language teacher. Below some of the results of characteristics' rankings from the questionnaire are presented.

Table 1. The Comparison of Kosovan Freshman and Senior Students' Rankings

Ranking	Teacher personality		Subject matter knowledge		Student-teacher relationship		Classroom management	
	Kosovan Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1*	27	25	40	37	23	27	10	11
2	20	10	18	33	47	37	15	20
3	28	37	19	18	23	18	9	27
4	25	28	23	12	7	18	45	42

*note: 1 -very important; 2-important; 3-less important; 4-not very important

The biggest similarity is in the subject matter knowledge category, where 40% of freshman students and 37% of seniors ranked it as the most important. However, the other ranking which is almost equal is where 10% of the freshman students and 11% of the senior students said that classroom management is not very important.

Table 2. The Comparison of Turkish Freshman and Senior Students' Rankings

Ranking	Teacher personality		Subject matter knowledge		Student-teacher relationship		Classroom management	
	Turkish Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior	Freshman	Senior
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1*	25	33	47	43	18	17	10	7
2	20	23	23	25	38	27	19	25
3	11	9	20	20	36	33	33	38
4	44	35	10	12	8	23	38	30

*note: 1 -very important; 2-important; 3-less important; 4-not very important

Overall Turkish freshman and senior students produced similar rankings for three of the characteristics. The two main differences occurring within students-teacher relationship are as follows: In the 2nd and 4th rankings, where 38% of Turkish freshman students ranked it as the second most important quality compared to 27% of Turkish senior students. Comparatively, 8% of Turkish senior students ranked it as the 4th most important quality contrasted by 23% of Turkish freshmen students.

Generally there are a few different rankings for three of the characteristics. The biggest variation between them is in teacher personality. 28% of Kosovan freshman students ranked it as the third most important characteristic compared to 11% of Turkish freshman students. Besides, 25% of Kosovan freshman students ranked teacher personality as the least important characteristic, but the percentage of the Turkish freshman students who considered it as the least important characteristic is 44%. Another difference can be seen in the 4th rankings of subject knowledge where 23% Kosovan

freshman students and 10% of the Turkish freshman students ranked it as the least important characteristic. The third major difference is in students-teacher relationship where 23% of Kosovan freshman students ranked it as the third most important characteristics, whereas the percentage of the Turkish freshman students who ranked it is the third are 36%. Teacher personality in the second ranking is the only characteristics which both Kosovan and Turkish freshman students ranked equally with 20%.

Table 3. The Comparison of Kosovan Freshman and Turkish Freshmen Students' Rankings

	Teacher personality		Subject matter knowledge		Student-teacher relationship		Classroom management	
	Kosovan Freshman	Turkish Freshman	Kosovan Freshman	Turkish Freshman	Kosovan Freshman	Turkish Freshman	Kosovan Freshman	Turkish Freshman
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1*	27	25	40	47	23	18	10	10
2	20	20	18	23	47	38	15	19
3	28	11	19	20	23	36	30	33
4	25	44	23	10	7	8	45	38

*note: 1 -very important; 2-important; 3-less important; 4-not very important

In general, Kosovan senior students and Turkish senior students stated some similar and some different rankings for three of the characteristics except subject knowledge. Kosovan senior students ranked subject knowledge as the most important characteristic with 37%, and Turkish senior students ranked it as the most important with 43%. 33% of Kosovan senior students thought that subject knowledge is the second most important characteristic, but the percentage of the Turkish senior students who ranked it as second most important characteristic is 25%. Another similarity can be seen in the 3rd rankings of subject knowledge where 18% Kosovan senior students and 20% of the Turkish senior students ranked it as third most important characteristic. Subject knowledge is the only characteristic which both Kosovan and Turkish senior students ranked equally as the least important characteristic with 12%.

Table 4. The Comparison of Kosovan Senior and Turkish Senior Students' Rankings

	Teacher personality		Subject matter knowledge		Student-teacher relationship		Classroom management	
	Kosovan Senior	Turkish Senior	Kosovan Senior	Turkish Senior	Kosovan Senior	Turkish Senior	Kosovan Senior	Turkish Senior
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1*	25	33	37	43	27	17	10	7
2	10	23	33	25	37	27	15	25
3	37	9	18	20	18	33	30	38
4	28	35	12	12	18	23	45	30

The biggest variation between Kosovan and Turkish senior students is in teacher personality. Kosovan senior students ranked it as the most important characteristic with 25% compared to 33% of Turkish senior students. For the 2nd rating, 10% of Kosovan senior students thought it is the second important

characteristic, but it was the second most important characteristic for 23% of Turkish senior students. Besides, 37% of Kosovan senior students ranked teacher personality as the third most important characteristic, but the percentage of the Turkish senior students who thought it as the least important characteristic is 9%, which shows the biggest percentage difference between these two nationalities. Another difference can be seen in the 2nd and 4th rankings of student-teacher relationship where 37% Kosovan senior students and 27% of the Turkish senior students ranked it as the second most important characteristic. 18% of Kosovan senior students and 33% of Turkish senior students ranked students-teacher relationship as the third most important characteristic. The last two differences are in classroom management in the 3rd and 4th rankings, with 27% of Kosovan senior students and 38% of Turkish senior students saying that it is the third most important characteristic. 42% of Kosovan students thought that classroom management is the least important characteristic, the percentage of Turkish senior students who ranked it as the least important characteristic is 30%.

4. Discussion

In this study, it is aimed to gather the data of Turkish and Kosovan university students' views on the concept of the ideal language teacher. The participants of the study have ranked several aspects of ideal language teachers' under teacher personality, subject matter knowledge, student-teacher relationship and classroom management categories. Cruickshank et. al.(2003) declared that when a teacher has deep knowledge, he/she becomes more competent to explain subject matters in ways students can understand. In Demirel's (1990) study, where he investigates the qualities of an effective foreign language teacher, having subject matter knowledge, and having personal strategies to teach were very common.

Considering whole group results, it is important to note that the first aspect both Kosovan and Turkish students considered when describing an ideal language teacher is his/her subject knowledge, which is ranked highest. The percentages of both groups are very similar for the subject knowledge category. The four groups think that no matter how strong language teachers' personalities are, or how good their relationships with their students are, first of all, they should have subject knowledge. As a result, it can be argued that the subject knowledge of a language teacher is a great factor that makes him/her a good teacher.

Establishing a positive relationship with the students is very important (Arıkan and Saraç-Süzer 2008). Telli, den Brok, and Çakiroğlu (2008), investigated that students in their study considered student-teacher relationship as one of the most important characteristics of an ideal teacher. The same findings could be noticed in current research where student-teacher relationship was ranked as one of the most prominent characteristics. It was almost equally ranked by both freshman and senior students that took part in this study.

With respect to the statement that "having a good personality" is a quality that students associated with good language teachers' consistent with Feldman's (1986) study on teachers' personality traits. Furthermore Taşkafa (1989) stated that having a good personality is one of the most important qualities expected from a teacher, that is very similar with the findings in the current study.

The main aim at having classroom management is to make sure that both learners and teachers are in a stress-free learning environment. In a classroom where the teacher maintains this environment, it lowers the affective filter and raises enthusiasm of the learners. However, classroom management is a characteristic that was ranked as not very important by the students. In a study conducted by Arıkan and Saraç-Süzer (2008), university level students gave little importance to teacher's classroom management skills. Similarly, the students in this study ranked classroom management as not a very important characteristic an ideal language teacher should possess.

As stated in the introduction part, culture and university level are some of the factors that affect the definition of an ideal language teacher. This study revealed the views of Kosovan and Turkish university students' of the English Language Teaching Department regarding the concept of the ideal

language teachers. It respectively showed that there is a large agreement between Kosovan and Turkish students as to the perceived qualities of ideal language teachers. One of the major findings of the study is that students believe the most important characteristic of ideal language teachers is subject matter knowledge.

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