

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER

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Abstract

Effective learning is strongly related to effective teacher and effective teaching. In this concept, teachers' characteristics gain crucial importance in understanding and lessening the problems and difficulties hindering students' long lasting learning process. The aim of this study is to present a literature review about the features of an effective English language teacher by comprising of the common characteristics in the studies and to give some pedagogical suggestions for English language teachers on how to increase their effectiveness in the classroom. Therefore, over 30 studies conducted in foreign language education area were overviewed and main characteristics of an effective English language teacher mostly cited in these studies were categorized under four headings. These four categories are as follow: socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge and personality characteristics. Findings showed that an English language teacher should have socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge and personal qualities for better language teaching and learning. In addition, an effective English language teacher should have a balanced combination of these four main aspects.

Keywords: effective, English language teacher, socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge

Özet

Etkili öğrenme, etkili öğretmen ve öğretimle yakından ilişkilidir. Bu bağlamda, öğretmenlerin özellikleri öğrencilerin uzun soluklu öğrenme süreçlerini engelleyen zorlukları ve problemleri azaltma ve anlamada büyük önem arz eder. Bu çalışmanın amacı, öğretmen eğitimiyle ilgili araştırmalarda yer alan ortak özellikleri araştırarak etkili İngilizce öğretmenin özellikleri hakkında bir literatüre özeti sunmak ve İngilizce öğretmenlerinin sınıf içindeki etkinliklerinin nasıl artırılmasına dönük bir takım pedagojik öneriler sunmaktır. Bu amaçla, yabancı dil öğretim alanında yapılmış 30'dan fazla çalışma gözden geçirilmiş ve bu çalışmalarda en fazla konu edinilen etkili İngilizce öğretmenin temel özellikleri dört temel başlık altında toplanmıştır. Bu dört kategori sırasıyla sosyo-duyusal beceriler, pedagojik bilgi, alan bilgisi ve kişisel özelliklerdir. Çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre bir İngilizce öğretmeni daha iyi dil öğretimi ve öğrenimi için sosyo-duyusal becerilere, pedagojik bilgiye, alan bilgisine ve kişisel niteliklere sahip olmalıdır. Ayrıca etkili bir İngilizce öğretmeni bu dört temel yönün özelliklerine eşit bir şekilde sahip olmalıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: etkili, İngilizce öğretmeni, sosyo-duyusal beceriler, pedagojik bilgi, alan bilgisi

Introduction

Teacher effectiveness is a cliché term in general education domain and there are many useful publications such as magazines, journals, books, papers and internet websites which you can easily reach with a little effort. It is always the main focus of teacher training programs which aim to train teachers pedagogically and create more superior and efficient teachers in the classrooms. Since most of the educators and scholars agree with the idea that teachers are inseparable parts of education and they have highly significant roles in the quality of teaching and raising successful learners, it would be better to talk much about the attributes of effective language teacher in terms of popular perspectives in order to increase language learners' academic achievements both inside and outside of the class. Then, it would be helpful for the improvement of language teaching and learning process in some degree by lessening the problems deriving from the teachers' side.

Before focusing on the characteristics of an ideal language teacher, let's shed some light on the definitions of the terms such as effective, effective learner and effective teacher in some degree. The concept of "effective" is perceived and interpreted differently by various researchers in different fields such as education, medicine, science and law. In spite of different perceptions on effectiveness, what these fields agree is the dictionary definition of effective which means being successful in producing a desired or intended result (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2006). Therefore, an effective learner is closely related with successful learner who sets and accomplishes his own goals (Karen, 2001). As it is difficult to define the concept "effective", it is also hard to reply the question what means an effective teacher in one sense as there are lots of definitions which totally or partially are true from their own perspectives (e.g. Cruickshank, Bainer and Metcalf, 1999; Koutsoulis, 2003; Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher and James, 2002; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie and Minor, 2001). Every definition on the effectiveness of teacher only looks at the bigger picture from one of hundreds of windows. The definitions of the terms indispensably include the personal, experiential, socio-economic, cultural and field based aspects of the person who defines them. Considering these diversities in definitions, it is almost difficult to find a common definition which suits all worldwide teaching contexts such as primary school, high school, university. In addition, as the effectiveness is an elusive concept, instead of giving an exact definition, most studies focus on the characteristics of effective teachers by working on learners from different educational contexts such high school students (e.g. Follman, 1995), prospective students (e.g. Walls, Nardi, Minden and Hoffman, 2002), graduate students (e.g. Xiaojun Shi, 2005). However, in general, focusing on the out-put of teaching and education, the effective teacher can be described as someone who should lead higher student achievement and long-lasting learning. (Cruickshank and Haefele, 2001).

When it comes to the concept of effective English language teacher, it is natural for the teacher to possess unique characteristics of the field as well as the general features of an effective teacher (Steinberg and Horvath, 1995). Uniqueness of the subject is not supposed to define and determine the attributes of the English language teacher. There is still no consensus on the determinants; therefore, an effective English language teacher has numerous definitions and determinants in terms of different perspectives such as affective factors, classroom management, and field knowledge. On this issue, the studies of Arıkan, Taşer and Saraç-Süzer (2008), Brosh (1996), Brown (1978), Sanderson (1983), Wei, den Brok and Zhou (2009) can be given as examples. While Brown (1978) draws attention to an effective language teacher in terms of affective factors,

and suggests that a good language teacher is someone who empathizes with his students, insures the presence of meaningful communicative contexts in classroom and encourages students' self-esteem, Sanderson (1993) focuses just on pedagogic and field knowledge of the teacher; and delineates a good language teacher who uses the target language predominantly, has clear and good pronunciation, stress and intonation, gets students involved in activities and is flexible with regard to objectives. By contributing to this diversity, Brosh (1996) determines the attributes considering the viewpoint of communication and says that as students' accomplishment of their educational aims are correlated with the effectiveness of the communication, language teacher as a communicator should have clear ideas and concepts about his subject matter knowledge not to block the student-teacher relationship. In their study on the discrepancy between preferred and actual English language teacher from a theoretical framework investigating perceived interpersonal teacher behaviors, Wei et al. (2009) reached the conclusion that the tolerant-authoritative profile is the most common interpersonal teacher profile in Chinese context. The results of the study revealed that tolerant-authoritative English language teacher supports student responsibility and freedom, frequently organizes their lessons around small group work activities and develops closer relationships with their students.

Considering the above perspectives in the domain of general instruction and multidimensional perspectives on the attributes of an effective English language teacher, what we aim here is to give some pedagogical suggestions for English language teachers on how to increase their effectiveness in the classroom. To fulfill our aim, we have analyzed a number of articles in language teaching area and delineated an effective English language teacher profile from the viewpoints of four main characteristics including socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge and personal qualities mostly cited in the literature (e.g. Arikan et al., 2008; Borg, 2006; Ghasemi and Hashemi, 2011; Park and Lee, 2006; Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009).

Four Main Characteristics of an Effective English Language Teacher

In this section, mostly cited four main features related to an effective English language teacher will be mentioned namely; socio-affective, pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge and personality characteristics.

Socio-Affective Skills

As in all other fields, it is crucial that teachers have some basic socio-affective skills to interact with their students and maintain the educational process effectively. These skills include a wide range of items such as motivating students, sparing time for students when they ask for help, being enthusiastic for teaching, having positive attitudes towards students, responding to students' needs and providing a stress-free classroom atmosphere (Cheung, 2006; Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009). In addition to these aspects, Foote, Vermette, Wisniewski, Agnello, and Pegano (2000, cited in Wichadee, 2010) also state that the relationship between teachers and students is one of the most striking features. In their study, Arikan, Taşer and Saraç-Süzer (2008) also highlight the importance of establishing and maintaining positive relationships with students. Besides, when trying to find similarities and differences between his study and the existing literature, Borg (2006) maintains the significance of the relationship between the members of the process. According to his study, the socio-affective skills enable teachers to establish good rapport with their students as well as maintaining the

process of education more effectively and successfully.

Another crucial point is what students experience, how they feel and how to approach their related problems in the process of teaching and learning. Feelings such as anxiety and fear, and other negative emotions are natural and expected parts of this process. Therefore, what is important for teachers is to create an environment in which their students can concentrate on learning in both cognitive and emotional levels. Moreover, socio-affective skills provide teachers with the opportunity to deal with what their students feel and experience in their learning process (Aydın, Bayram, Canıdar, Çetin, Ergünay, Özdem and Tunç, 2009). In other words, in order to be effective, teachers should combine their behavior with both their minds and emotions.

Pedagogical Knowledge

In order to conduct any kind of job properly, one should have the knowledge of how to do it. S/he should be aware of the procedures and the strategies to follow in the process, which is pedagogical knowledge. In his study, Vélez-Rendón (2002, as cited in Aydın et al., 2009) defines pedagogical knowledge as what teachers know about teaching their subjects. He also claims that without pedagogical knowledge teachers cannot convey what they know to their learners. The results of the study conducted by Aydın et al. (2009) show that students prefer their teacher to have the knowledge of how to teach in order to deal with the affective domain. To deliver the content in the best way, an effective teacher needs both field specific knowledge and knowledge of how to present it (Brophy, 1991, cited in Aydın et al., 2009). Furthermore, Clark and Walsh (2004) emphasize the significance of pedagogical knowledge by claiming that it is a sophisticated form of knowledge hard to obtain, and not available to everyone that seeks it. Different studies refer to numerous dimensions of pedagogical knowledge such as providing students with an environment in which they can be relaxed in order to learn and produce well, guiding students, having the ability to organize, explain and clarify, as well as arousing and sustaining interest, motivating students, giving positive reinforcement, allocating more time to preparation and delivery, and teaching with effective classroom materials by integrating technology (Arikan et al., 2008; Aydın et al., 2009; Borg, 2006; Cheung, 2006; Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009; Yu-Hsin, 1999) In addition, effective teachers should basically have classroom management skills defined as practices and procedures that a teacher uses to maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can occur (Wong and Wong, 1998). The basic aim at maintaining classroom management is to create stress-free learning environments for both learners and teachers by lowering affective filter and raising motivation. Stress-free environments provide not only learners but also teachers with the relaxing atmosphere to take part in the process willingly and to eliminate or at least minimize the fear of making mistakes.

Subject-Matter Knowledge

Another main area that attracts attention is the subject-matter knowledge which teachers should possess regarding their specific field. To make a general definition of this notion, Vélez-Rendón (2002, cited in Aydın et al, 2009) regards the subject matter knowledge as what teachers know about what they teach. Another study pointing out the significance of this knowledge type (Buchman 1984, cited in Aydın et al, in 2009) suggests the use of subject matter knowledge in different phases of the educational process such as using target language effectively in class, integrating lessons based on students' backgrounds and preparing effective lesson

plans. In addition to these items, different studies contribute to the notion of the subject matter knowledge from different perspectives ranging from having knowledge of the target language knowledge concerning fluency, accuracy, lexicon and pronunciation to being knowledgeable on target culture (Borg, 2006; Park and Lee, 2006; Werbinska, 2009).

Subject matter knowledge enables teachers to make use of audio-visual materials when possible, guide students to get some learning strategies, teach a topic in accordance with students' proficiency levels, and watch and inform students about their progress in language learning. To highlight these aspects, Arkan (2010) maintains that effective teachers should have the subject-matter knowledge to prepare appropriate lesson plans besides using adequate resources for content delivery. Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) point out the importance of field knowledge of teachers as they are the providers of knowledge in the process. Their study shows that one of the requirements of being an effective teacher is to have the mastery of the subject matter knowledge in their specific field. The more teachers have the subject-matter knowledge, the more effectively they teach and the more successful results will be obtained.

Personality Characteristics

People who work in any profession indispensably bring their personal characteristics in the working environment. This is also valid for teachers who not only are human beings but also deal with human. Therefore, in addition to the subject-matter knowledge or the pedagogical knowledge, teachers are also supposed to have some essential personal characteristics to teach effectively and to be successful in their profession. Malikow (2006) lists the personality characteristics most often cited by the studies conducted on what personal qualities an effective teacher should have as follows: being challenging and having reasonably high expectations, having sense of humor, being enthusiastic and creative. To this list, other studies have added being tolerant, patient, kind, sensible and open-minded, flexible, optimistic, enthusiastic, having positive attitudes toward new ideas, and caring for students as characteristics necessary for being an effective teacher (Cheung, 2006; Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009; Werbinska, 2009). Clark and Walsh (2004) suggest that when teachers combine all of these expected characteristics in the profession, they can end up with a trusting relationship with their students.

Discussion and Suggestions

The obtained findings from the relevant studies indicate that an effective language teacher have the common characteristics in terms of socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge and personal qualities in the language teaching process. This study indicates that an effective English language teacher should have precise characteristics to achieve successful language teaching.

Regarding socio-affective skills, the findings reveal that the effective language teacher should be enthusiastic to teach English, have good relationships with students, care students' needs about English and motivate students by creating autonomy supportive environments within which students can motivate themselves. According to the studies, common ideas on the pedagogical knowledge of the teacher are as follow; an effective English language teacher should guide students with informational feedbacks, have specific abilities to organize and explain the course, use eclectic approaches in language teaching integrating technology, have abilities about effective classroom management strategies, etc. Concerning the subject-matter

knowledge of the effective teacher, the studies show that an effective English language teacher should speak English as much as she can, integrate lessons with students' backgrounds, have superior in English lexicon, pronunciation, use audio-visual material, care students' proficiency levels, and so forth. As for the personal qualities, the personal characteristics provide teachers enter the profession. The common views about the personal qualities of an effective English language are reported: teacher should have a sense of humor, be enthusiastic and creative, be tolerant, patient, kind, sensible and open-minded, flexible, optimistic, enthusiastic, having positive attitudes toward new ideas, and other personal characteristics

To sum up, although there have been many studies related to the characteristics which an effective language teacher should have, the common point stated by them is that an effective English language teacher should have all aspects of a teacher including socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge and personal qualities. In addition, many different studies' views about what constitutes an effective language teacher mostly matched each other even though the degree of their agreement on the common characteristics is a bit different. Finally, the concept of an effective English language teacher consists of a balanced combination of above four main aspects.

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