Qualities of the Ideal Language Teacher as Perceived by Language Students of the Lagos State University

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Abstract
This study investigated the perceptions of students on the qualities of an ideal language teacher in Lagos State University. Selected respondents answered a 42-item Likert-scale questionnaire concerning their perceived qualities or personality traits of a successful language teacher. Findings showed that teaching experience, teachers showing love to students, creative, friendly, enthusiastic teachers with humour were ranked by language students as the most important qualities of an ideal language teacher. Furthermore, there was no significant difference between male and female students' perceptions of an ideal language teacher, (t = -.364, df = 328, p = .716). There was a negative correlation between students' language of study and their perception of an ideal language teacher (r = -.162). Recommendations on the need to enhance the inherent personality traits and professional qualities of language teachers, explore the optimum potentials in order to maximize students language learning potentials and competencies.

Key words*:* Qualities, Ideal, Language teacher, Lagos State University, Language students.

Introduction

It can be argued that one of the most effective pathways to improving students' learning outcomes is the quality of teaching; especially teachers' ability to motivate and facilitate such learning. Language teachers need to make informed decisions on how to cultivate and maintain motivation throughout the academic year to enhance learning. In order to do that, one of the important variables is to examine how their students perceive effective language teaching and who an effective teacher is. Proper identification of these perceptions will have an obvious relevance to understanding their expectations of the course, their commitment to the class as well as to the opportunities they should be provided with to be successful and satisfied with their language programme.

It is necessary to understand how specific groups of language learners in socio-cultural contexts perceive who an effective language teacher is (Borg, 2006). It is hoped that the outcomes of this study will be particularly informative to lecturers, course designers and teacher trainers working in tertiary education in the field of language teaching.

Numerous studies on teaching effectiveness and the behaviours of effective teachers especially as perceived by students in different contexts worldwide have been published in the domain of foreign language education (Thomson, 2008 and Borg, 2006; Chen 2012, Hismanoglu 2019). Influenced by the work of Borg (2006), Lee (2010) investigated the distinctive characteristics of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, and identified three areas which distinguish language teaching from the teaching of other subjects. These were the nature of the subject-matter, the teaching approach and the teacher's personality. The first area was perceived by Japanese EFL college students as unique to EFL teachers as the latter are expected to use the target language as the medium of instruction, which according to Borg (2006), it is a medium that students do not yet understand. This inevitably places more demands on a language teacher's proficiency in the target language and consequently on his ability to simplify his language or adjust it according to the learning situation and his students' level. A language teacher's command of the target language was also highlighted by other relevant studies.

Hismanoglu (2019) investigated the characteristics of effective EFL teachers from the perspectives of preparatory program Turkish EFL students. To achieve this purpose, 93 preparatory program Turkish EFL students from the Foreign Languages School of a state university located in the west part of Turkey participated in the study. The questionnaire designed by Salahshour & Hajizadeh (2013) was utilized in this study by the researcher with some minor modifications on it. The findings of this study showed that being enthusiastic and lively, having interest in his/her job and feeling responsibility for teaching, being creative and spontaneous, being self-confident, having a loud and clear voice and having patience with students were the prominent personal traits of effective EFL teachers. The findings also revealed that the majority of the students viewed their teacher as an effective EFL teacher because s/he presented the topic via

a variety of examples, had adequate level of linguistic knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and communication skills and dealt with them individually and s/he was patient to them. Lastly, the findings of this study regarding (a) command in English, (b) teaching methodology, (c) evaluation method, (d) amount of teacher's emphasis on different language skills, (e) mastery over teaching, (f) teacher-student relationship and (g) classroom management were in line with those of previous studies conducted by other researchers in the related literature.

In the Iranian EFL context, Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011), Salahshour & Hajizadeh (2013) and Ramazani (2014) concentrated on investigating students' perceptions of the qualities of effective EFL teachers. For instance, Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011) explored students' perceptions of the qualities of effective EFL teachers based on three major categories: (1) content knowledge, (2) instructional knowledge, (3) socio-affective skills. It was revealed in the study that students viewed some teacher qualities like proficiency in reading and speaking, the ability to increase students' enthusiasm in learning English, constructing students' self-reliance and incentive as globally approved features. It was also found in the study that students highlighted listening ability and structural ability as particularly prominent.

In another study, Salahshour & Hajizadeh (2013) investigated 42 Iranian students' views of the qualities of good EFL teachers by utilizing a 58-item questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that the most prominent ten qualities of effective EFL teachers were: (1) Being involved in his/her profession, (2) Possessing a sense of liability for his/her profession, (3) Being willing and active, (4) Being self-reliant, (5) Being prompt, (6) Stimulating students to deploy L2 everytime, (7) Presenting clear grammatical revision, (8) Presenting through clarification during reading and listening activities, (9) Stressing common spoken quizzes, (10) Stressing all language skills, particularly speaking. Ramazani (2014) also explored 384 university students' beliefs about the qualities of effective EFL teachers by utilizing a self-report questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that students perceived their EFL teacher's pedagogical knowledge as important as his/her socio-affective skills. The results of the study also unearthed that variables such as gender and achievement had an impact on students'

beliefs about the qualities of effective EFL teachers.

Other important characteristics identified in Lee's study were the teacher's ability to teach comprehensibly, deliver interesting lessons and treat students fairly. Similar findings were also found in Park and Lee's study (2006) who investigated the characteristics of effective English teachers as perceived by high school students in Korea. Although variables such as gender and performance seemed to have contributed significantly in the way students ranked certain characteristics, they all ranked pedagogical knowledge the highest and agreed on the importance of reading and speaking proficiency, the teacher's ability to arouse students' interest in learning English and build their self-confidence.

Other attributes that could affect students' perception of their language teachers is a teacher's pleasant and supportive personality as well as the use of more interesting activities. Findings from a study conducted by Chen (2012) were grouped into two broad categories relating to personal trait-related and classroom teaching-related characteristics. The former mainly included emotion, kindness, fairness, lenience and responsibility, while the latter category was concerned with skills and techniques of lesson delivery and error correction, language used in teaching, classroom activity organisation and classroom atmosphere creation. Barnes' study (2010) examined students' beliefs about the attributes of effective EFL lecturers in a Korean University setting was also particularly informative and supportive of the other studies mentioned above. Students emphasised the importance of the language teacher's friendly and supportive personality, arguing that it contributes significantly to reducing fear and language anxiety and promoting learning by making students feel valued and comfortable with using the language in FL classroom. Lesson delivery was also considered of utmost importance with particular emphasis on the use of various teaching methods and teaching materials and the employment of group work. Similarly, Bell (2005) and Lee (2010) assert that the language teacher should maximize students' involvement by making use of group work and exposing students to more communicative activities..

Other review of studies which have been carried out on the characteristics and qualities of effective EFL teachers on a number of variables, have shown that

despite the differences in the level of importance given to various features, there seems to be a strong consensus on the types of knowledge and behaviours that language teachers need to possess and display. Among these are competence in the target language along with good communication skills, ability to deliver the lesson in meaningful and engaging ways, the use of group work to encourage greater degree of learner involvement, ability to maintain a motivating and supportive learning environment and tolerance to learners' linguistic errors usage.

Although traditionally, females and males are assumed to have different abilities regarding language, language learning and different analytical and mathematical skills, recent research studies have begun to refute this mainstream thinking. For instance, in relation to girls' and boys' self-conceptualization, Marsh, Byrne and Shavelson (1988) demonstrated that girls had a high self-concept of verbal skills and high achievement in terms of verbal skills, while boys had only a high self-concept of mathematical skills but low achievement. Nevertheless, the mainstream research focusing on the relationship between genders and second language learning has proved some differences between sexes. In their study of females' and males' attitudes toward second language learning, Gardner and Lambert (1972) observed that not only females had more positive attitudes toward the speakers of a second language but also they were more motivated toward learning a second language than males were.

Green and Oxford (1995) investigated the effects of gender and proficiency level on strategy use of EFL students. They found that learner strategies were used more by women than men, and more among successful language learners. Fourteen strategies were used significantly more often by women in this study, although only one was used significantly more often by men: watching television programs and video movies in English.

Statement of the Problem

The Lagos State University (LASU), located in Ojo, Lagos State Nigeria, offers to her teaming students five different languages of Arabic, English, Portuguese, French and Yoruba. While Yoruba is learnt and taught as one of the Nigerian native Languages and English Language as an L2, Arabic, French and Portuguese are taught as Foreign Languages respectively. Previous studies focused largely on students'

achievement in the various languages with little emphasis on their perception of the qualities an ideal language teacher should possess. Therefore, this study investigated the perception of the qualities of an ideal language teacher among students of Lagos State University, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed the descriptive approach to data collection and analysis. The respondents of this study were 331 third-years undergraduate students of the Lagos State University who majored in five different Language disciplines (Arabic -87, French-36, English-153, Portuguese-19 and Yoruba-36). Sixty-eight male and forty-two female students took part in the survey. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was about the respondents' background information including gender and department of study. The second part consisted of 42 Likert-scale questions. Ten questions concentrated on personal skills and classroom behaviour, fourteen items were related to personal and personality characteristics of teachers, eleven were related to the content and pedagogical knowledge of the teachers, and seven were focused on lesson organization and preparation. The study raised and answered 2 Research Questions and tested 1 null Hypothesis thus:

Research Question 1: What teacher's personality qualities do language students perceive as being ideal for teaching their language of study?

Research Question 2: What professional traits are perceived as important by language students in their teachers?

Hypotheses

$H0_1$: There will be no significant relationships between language students' gender and their perceptions of the ideal Language teacher.

Data Analysis

In terms of data analysis, quantitative data were analysed by using t-test at 0.05 level of significance

Results

Research Question 1: What teacher's personality qualities do language students perceive as being ideal for teaching their language of study?

Table 1: Perception of language students on ideal teacher's personality qualities for teaching based on their language of study

Items	A (%)	D (%)	NF (%)	Mean Ranking
Experience	246 (74.3)	83 (25.1)	2 (0.6)	1st
Loving	231 (69.8)	97 (29.3)	3 (0.9)	2nd
Creative	231 (69.8)	100 (30.2)	2 (0.6)	2nd
Friendly	223 (67.4)	108 (32.6)	4 (1.2)	4th
Stimulates interest in the Language	223 (67.4)	104 (31.4)	4 (1.2)	4th
Enthusiastic	222 (67.1)	109 (32.9)	8 (2.4)	6th
Have a sense of humour	222 (67.1)	107 (32.3)	2 (0.6)	6th
Shares personal experiences with students	210 (63.4)	110 (33.2)	11 (3.3)	8th
Fair and just	209 (63.1)	110 (33.2)	12 (3.6)	9th
Nigerian, but good in English/Arabic/ French/Portuguese/Yoruba	188 (56.8)	137 (41.4)	6 (1.8)	10th
Young	150 (45.3)	163 (49.2)	18 (5.4)	11th
Native speaker of Arabic/French/Portuguese	149 (45.0)	172 (52.0)	10 (3.0)	12th
Should be a male	119 (36.0)	182 (55.0)	30 (9.1)	13th

Table 1 shows that 246 (74.3%) of the students ranked teaching experience as the most important personality quality of an ideal language teacher; followed by language teachers who show love to students and are creative (231, 69.8%), while the next important qualities of an ideal teacher as perceived by the language students are teachers who are friendly and teachers who stimulate students' interest (223, 67.4%); enthusiastic teachers and teachers who show sense of humour (222, 67.1%) and teachers who share their personal experiences with students (210, 63.4%) were ranked 8th position. Also, 209 (63.1%) and 188 (56.8%) of the language students respectively agreed that ideal language teacher should be fair and just, and could be a Nigerian, but good in English/Arabic/ French/Portuguese/Yoruba. Furthermore, Table 1 reveals that there seem to be no age discrimination regarding an ideal teacher as testified by 49.2% of the respondents. However, 52% disagreed with an ideal teacher being exclusively a male.

Research Question 2: What professional traits are perceived as important by language students in their teachers?

Table 2: Professional traits perceived as important by language students of an ideal teacher

Items	A (%)	D (%)	NF (%)
Have sound knowledge of vocabulary	240 (72.5)	82 (24.8)	9 (2.7)
Have sound knowledge of grammar	239 (72.2)	86 (26.0)	6 (1.8)
Reduces students' anxiety	236 (71.3)	91 (27.5)	4 (1.2)
Uses technology and visual materials well	234 (70.7)	93 (28.1)	3 (0.9)
Takes attendance	232 (70.1)	99 (29.9)	- (-)
Regularly gives tests and quizzes	209 (63.1)	122 (36.9)	- (-)
Plays games during teaching	164 (49.5)	166 (50.2)	1 (0.3)
Asks students to check each other's work	182 (55.0)	145 (43.8)	4 (1.2)
Gives assignment regularly	214 (64.7)	117 (35.3)	- (-)
Acts as the only authority in the classroom	181 (54.7)	150 (45.3)	- (-)
Speaks rather than listens to students	159 (48.0)	171 (51.7)	1 (0.3)

Students in their various language of study perceived having sound knowledge of vocabulary (240, 72.5), grammatically sound (239, 72.2%), reducing students' anxiety (236, 71.3%) and adopting effective usage of technology and virtual materials (234, 70.7%) as the most important professional traits of an ideal language teacher as indicated in Table 2. The table also revealed that 214 (64.6%), 209 (63.1%), 182 (55%) and 181 (54.7%) of respondents respectively agreed that giving assignment regularly, regular administering tests and quizzes, allowing students to check each other's' work and acting as the only authority in the class were perceived as important professional traits in their language teachers. On the contrary, 50.4% of the respondents did not perceive playing games during teaching as an important professional trait.

Hypotheses

$H0_1$: There will be no significant relationships between language students' gender and their perceptions on qualities of an ideal Language teacher.

Table 4: Pearson Moment Correlation of students' perceptions of the ideal Language teacher based on gender.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value
Perception	331	43.32	1.406	.020	.716
Sex	330	1.45	.498		

Table 4 reveals that there is no significant relationship between language students' gender and their perceptions on qualities of an ideal Language teacher, r = .020, N = 331, p = .716, 2-tailed. This implies that the relationship between language students' gender and their perceptions on qualities of an ideal Language teacher was not statistically related, although it is an extremely very weak correlation since 0.04% of the variation is explained. This is an indication that students' gender does not influence their perception of an ideal language teacher.

Discussion

The present study investigated the effective characteristics of language teachers as perceived by the university students of 5 different languages in LASU. As the above findings show learners of these languages hold different views toward some characteristics of an effective language teacher.

The obtained findings from the study indicate that an effective language teacher should possess common characteristics in terms of personality qualities, pedagogical knowledge and subject matter knowledge in the language teaching process. This results indicate that an effective language teacher should possess these characteristics to achieve successful language teaching; (1) experienced; (2) loving; (3) creative; (4) friendly; (5) show keen interest in the target language and (6)be enthusiastic to teach. According to this study, the least in the perceptions of the sampled students regarding the qualities of effective language teacher are the (1) teachers' gender, (2) his country or place of origin and (3) age.

Regarding Professional traits, the findings reveal that the effective language teacher should have; (1) sound knowledge of vocabulary, (2) sound knowledge of grammar; (3) should be able to reduce students' language anxiety and (4) utilize technology and visual materials while teaching. The least of these traits as

perceived by the students are; (1) the teacher's ability to speak rather than listen to the students while teaching; (2) being authoritarian in the class and (3) giving assignment to students. Some of these identified qualities are parallel with those highlighted in study of Shishavan & Sadeghi of (2009) that assessed teachers' and learners' rating of an effective language teacher. While the teachers seem to agree more strongly than the sampled students that an effective Language teacher should assign homework, integrate group activities and assess students' work, the students on the other hand, perceive an effective teacher to be the one who teaches the target language (Persian) in the learner's native language (Persian) among other qualities.

The finding of the tested hypothesis showed that there was no significant relationship between language students' gender and their perceptions on qualities of an ideal Language teacher. This finding does not confirm past studies like that of Lavin, Korte, Davies (2012 that) reveled that there are differences between females and male students rating of teachers effectiveness and qualities wherein, females in general tend to rate teachers higher in terms of their contribution to the love of the target language in their students. Lavin, et al (2012) findings was also consistent with AlTameemy (2019)'s that showed a statistically significant difference that can be ascribed to gender in relation to their perceptions of teachers qualities and effectiveness. Ultimately, this study concludes that the perceptions of students with regards to teachers' effectiveness and qualities is affected by many other factors as level of language study, age and previous knowledge.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that every student wishes to have the best teacher. However, what makes a teacher successful in his/her teaching has always been a thorny question among educational practitioners. Research has demonstrated that teachers' teaching style and the decisions they make in classrooms equally have a great influence on the learners' learning outcome (Markley, 2004). Teachers who are able to encourage, inspire, and motivate the learners can provide useful experience for the students, which will positively influence their academic life. In contrast, those teachers who are unable to fulfill such tasks will undoubtedly create negative experience for

the learners and make their learning inefficient. Personal experiences have shown that one single negative experience with a teacher is enough for a student to form negative feelings about school and learning, which can detrimental effects on one's future life.

Language teachers are not an exception to this rule and they also play an important role in improving teaching quality. An effective language teacher can facilitate the learning process, influence how students perceive the course content, and can create a positive learning experience for the language learners.

Finally, the fact that no significant differences were found between students depending on their gender provide evidence that there are other different factors which may have an influence on students' individual needs and learning styles and consequently on their views of what characterize effective language teachers. Teachers should therefore be aware of the importance of student individuality and try to include in their lessons a variety of teaching methods, materials, topics and promote different learning strategies which would cater for the needs of all students in class. In conclusion, the findings of this study are complementary and beneficial not only for in-service and pre-service language teachers. Language teachers should adapt, develop or modify their teaching techniques, strategies and principles so as to meet their students' needs and expectations in the classroom. Likewise, pre-service Language teachers should also try to learn what qualities are described as the qualities of effective teachers before they begin the teaching profession.

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