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Excellent English Teachers – A View from English Teachers

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ABSTRACT

English proficiency among Malaysians has been under highlight recently. Among the factors that are investigated are the excellent practice of Malaysian English Teachers. In order to improve teaching practices, teachers need to know what is considered excellent practice. Several researches have pointed out what criteria is considered as being excellent teachers. From meta-analysis of previous research, 16 criteria were found as being criteria of Excellent Teachers with the most common criteria relating to being Student-Centred. The objective of this research is to investigate criteria of excellence among English Teachers. A small-scale study was conducted among Malaysian English Teachers. A questionnaire was distributed among Head Panels of English from an education district with 74 items pertaining to description of being an excellent teacher. The findings have revealed an interesting insight as to what is considered excellent among English teachers. Out of 74 items, 10 items that had the highest mean scores were identified. The aspects that had the highest mean score was Personal Belief and Classroom Environment. Among the criteria with the lowest mean score was Students Centred and Professional Development. It is hoped that this research will give an insight of what is criteria is looked at when discussing the issue of Excellence among Malaysian English Teachers.

Keywords:

Criteria; excellence; english teachers;
classroom; student-centred

1. Introduction

Improving the practices among teachers have always been of paramount importance for schools. English is among the subject that is under scrutiny due to the opinion that Malaysians' English proficiency is in decline. Is the teacher practice to be a factor in this decline? To improve learning outcome of students, what is considered to be excellent in the profession. The objective of the research is to investigate criteria of excellence among English Teachers. The method of collecting the data was through a questionnaire. The questionnaire had 74 items and was distributed online using google forms. 25 English teachers responded. The mean score of the items were analysed. 10 items were identified from the highest mean score between 3.48 to 3.64

1.2 Research Question

Our research aims to investigate what is considered excellent practice of teaching. Hence, our main research question is:

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“What are English Language Teachers’ Views of Excellence in English Language Teaching?”

1.3 Research Objectives

The goal of this research is to find out what is considered excellent practice of teaching of English. Hence, our studies objectives are as follow:

“What are the top 10 criteria of excellence of english language teaching as perceived by English teacher.”

2. Methodology

2.1 Excellent Teacher

Policies have been implemented in the form of performance assessment as part of the annual review [13]. Quality of teachers are observed through Malaysian Education Quality System and the Annual Marks Review. Although there is a system of performance review, the stakeholders especially have opined that quality of English teachers are still in decline. To understand this issue, the concept of quality teachers is needed to be explored.

Excellence is only one of three states of quality [14] in a parameter beginning with bad, good and finally excellent. Several researches have been conducted to find out the criteria of excellent teachers as perceived by teachers and students. Three studies were noted before 2010 and five studies after 2010. The table below presents the meta-analysis if the studies and the criteria.

Table 1

Criteria of Excellent Teacher *1. Hilgemann & Blodget [9]; 2. Bidgood & Cox [2] ; 3. OEIE [16]; 4. Debruyne & Debruyne [5] ; 5. Paez-Quinto [17] ; 6. Witte & Jansen [23] ; 7. Elham Yazdanmehr, *et al.*, [7] ; 8. Ibrahim *et al.*, [10].

Criteria	Study*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Frequency
Student-centered		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Teaching Strategies		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			6
Professional development			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	5
Student engagement		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				5
Long term development			✓	✓	✓	✓				4
Personal belief		✓		✓	✓	✓				4
Use of resources			✓	✓	✓				✓	4
Content Knowledge				✓	✓			✓		3
Reflective practitioner				✓		✓	✓			3
Learning support			✓	✓	✓					3
Classroom Environment		✓		✓						2
Recognition				✓				✓		2
Cooperation with Community				✓	✓					1
Education background							✓			1
Years of teaching							✓			1
Gender							✓			1

From the eight studies reviewed it can be seen that the top 4 aspects that are looked for in excellence are student centred, teaching strategies, professional development and student engagement. The two studies before 2010 showed that the credentials of the teachers are not very much highlighted. Studies after 2010 showed that there is an observation of the teachers’ credentials like education background, teachers’ knowledge and skills.

2.2 Instrument Development

A questionnaire from was adapted from [16], there were 68 items originally and another 6 were added with items pertaining to teacher background. Each item, has a Likert-type scale of 1-4 with 1 – Not Important At All, 2 – Not Very Important, 3 – Important and 4 - Very Important. The construct that the questionnaire covers are Teacher Background, Classroom Culture, Content Knowledge, Pedagogical Knowledge, Assessment and Motivation and Personal Belief.

2.3 Distribution

A small-scale study was conducted. The questionnaire was distributed among English Head Panels of an education district in Johor. 25 English teachers responded to the questionnaire. Head Panels were chosen to distribute the questionnaire as they are the representative for each group of teachers in the school. There were four education zones under the education district, the school chosen are representative of the locality the school covers under each zone.

2.4 Analysis

The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency and mean scores. An interval of mean is created to give interpretation of the weighted mean score. For analysis of the mean score class boundaries were calculated. The class boundaries are tabulated below.

Table 1

Interpretation of the mean scores

1.00 – 1.59	VERY LOW
1.60 – 2.19	LOW
2.20 – 2.80	MODERATE
2.81 – 3.40	HIGH
3.41 – 4.00	VERY HIGH

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Important Criteria

The mean score of the items were analysed. The 10 items were identified from the highest mean score between 3.45 to 3.65 with the level of importance interpreted as “Very High”. It can be seen from the analysis of the mean scores, the teachers viewed the personal belief that teachers believe that all students can learn, that their teaching is affected by both attitudes and skills and have a passion for teaching as the three most important criteria of an excellent teacher. Item for classroom environment, that is to create an environment that advances students learning had the 2nd highest mean score. Also, an item considered under the category of Content Knowledge is among the top 5 mean scores. It may seem that from the top 5 items, 4 items ranked are mostly about the teachers themselves and 1 item is related to the students.

From frequency analysis, item 72 had the highest percentage of respondents (72%) rating the item as very important. For Item 25, 73 and 71 a range of 64 to 68 percent respondents rating it as very important. To highlight, item 71 surprisingly had 4 percent of the respondents rating it as not important at all. For the remaining 6 items, item 55, 69, 46, 40, 18, 14 had 56 percent of the respondents rating these items as very important.

Table 2
Analysis and ranking of 10 items with the highest mean score

Ranking	ITEM	MEAN SCORE	LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE	Criteria	
1	ITEM72	Believe all students can learn	3.64	VERY HIGH	Personal Belief
2	ITEM25	Create an environment that advances student learning	3.6	VERY HIGH	Classroom Environment
3	ITEM73	Believe their teaching is affected by both their attitudes and skills.	3.56	VERY HIGH	Personal Belief
4	ITEM71	Have a passion for teaching.	3.56	VERY HIGH	Personal Belief
5	ITEM55	Have subject content knowledge mastery of the English Language	3.56	VERY HIGH	Content Knowledge
6	ITEM69	Desire to be excellent teachers.	3.52	VERY HIGH	Professional Development
7	ITEM46	Engage students in active learning and researching.	3.52	VERY HIGH	Student Engagement
8	ITEM40	Know the cognitive abilities of the students whom they teach regularly.	3.48	VERY HIGH	Student-Centered
9	ITEM18	Create a desire in others that they too can and should aspire to be an excellent teacher.	3.48	VERY HIGH	Professional Development
10	ITEM14	Actively pursue opportunities to learn how to become better teachers.	3.48	VERY HIGH	Professional Development

Table 3
Analysis of rating frequency of the 10 items with the highest mean score

ITEM	PERCENTAGE				
		1	2	3	4
ITEM72	Believe all students can learn	0	8	20	72
ITEM25	Create an environment that advances student learning	0	4	32	64
ITEM73	Believe their teaching is affected by both their attitudes and skills.	0	8	28	64
ITEM71	Have a passion for teaching.	4	4	24	68
ITEM55	Have subject content knowledge mastery of the English Language	0	0	44	56
ITEM69	Desire to be excellent teachers.	0	4	40	56
ITEM46	Engage students in active learning and researching.	0	4	40	56
ITEM40	Know the cognitive abilities of the students whom they teach regularly.	0	8	36	56
ITEM18	Create a desire in others that they too can and should aspire to be an excellent teacher.	0	8	36	56
ITEM14	Actively pursue opportunities to learn how to become better teachers.	0	8	36	56

3.1.1 Personal belief

Item 72, 73 and 71 each have a mean score 3.64, 3.6 and 3.56 respectively. Items 72 has the highest mean score from this criteria and Items 73 and 71 each are placed at 3rd and 4th place in the timetable. Item 72 had 72% responded that it is very important that Excellent teachers believe all students can learn. Item 73 had 64% responded it is very important Excellent teachers believe their teaching is affected by both attitudes and skill. For item 71, although 68% responded that it is very important that Excellent teachers have passion for teaching, surprisingly 4% responded that it is not important at all.

Personal Belief seems to be central to the teachers' response in this study. The belief that all students can learn, attitudes and beliefs affect students and that Excellent teachers should have passion for teaching are rated highly in this study. All these three items pertain to the core of the teachers' beliefs. This seems to be contradictory to a previous finding [15], the researchers found in their study that beliefs related to everyday practice has an effect on quality and effectiveness of instructions. From a more recent study [19], where the research was conducted at a Low achieving school among high achieving students. The researcher found that the teacher's teaching these high achieving students also have the belief that all students can learn and would learn. It was found also that teachers believe that student learning is a reflection of their teaching practice [19]. It may seem that a teacher's personal belief is still important to the teachers themselves in order to become Excellent English Teachers.

3.1.2 Classroom environment

Item 25 had the second highest mean score of 3.6 where 64% of the respondents rated the item as very important that Excellent Teachers create an environment that advances students learning. Only 4% rated this item as not very important. Only Item 25 is found to be in the top 10 mean scores when analysed and is placed at 2nd.

From the previous studies reviewed in the literature review, only two studies mentioned Classroom Environment as a criterion of Excellent Teacher. From the analysis of the mean score and response, it seems that Classroom Environment is quite an important criterion to be looked at. The classroom environment criterion is considered as the 7th criteria of an Excellent teacher [9]. However, from another study it was found that Item 25 had the highest mean score [16]. This comes to show that Classroom Environment created by Excellent teachers is becoming more prominent.

3.1.3 Content knowledge

Item 55 had a mean score of 3.56 with 56% rating the item as very important and 44% rating it as important. No respondent had rated the item as "not important at all" and "not very important". It can be assumed that the teachers all agree that that having subject content knowledge Mastery of English is a pertinent as an Excellent English teacher. However, in the ranking of the mean score, this item is placed at 5th.

The finding shows that the item's mean score pertaining to Content Knowledge places it at 5th place among other items. Slightly more than half of the respondents rated this item as a "very important" criterion. This finding is in contradiction to a previous study where this item was not in the top 20 of the mean score ranking [16]. It is much lower in the list of mean scores analysis. Also, competency of subject matter is listed in 9th among the 13 principles of what makes and excellent teacher [5]. The respondents of this study views that Mastery of English is important but not as important as the teacher's beliefs. In comparison to the previous studies, it may seem that Malaysian English teachers places Mastery as being more pertinent compared to the other two previous studies. This may be due to the fact that English teachers now are being screened to find out their proficiency level and are prescribed to reach a certain level in the CEFR test.

3.1.4 Professional Development

For items under this category, Item 69 had the mean score of 3.53 with 56% responded that it is very important for teachers to desire to be excellent teachers. Only 4% had responded that it is not very important. This item is placed at 6th in the list. Another two items are at the bottom of the list,

item 18 and item 14. Item 18 and 14 had a mean score of 3.48 with 56% responded it is very important and 8% responded that it is not very important. Item 18 and 14 are at 9th and 10th place in the timetable.

The three items pertaining to professional development that is in the top 10 of the mean scores are 1) Desire to be Excellent teachers, 2) Create a desire in others that they too can and should aspire to be an excellent teacher and 3) Actively pursue opportunities to learn how to become better teachers. Desire to be an excellent teacher had a higher mean score compared to the other two items. However, the placing of the mean scores in OEIE study is much higher at 4th place out of 20 items [16]. It may seem that having the desire to be Excellent teachers is not as an important criterion as the other items relating to Personal Beliefs and Content Knowledge. In Malaysia, it may seem that teachers are seen as being altruistic in nature. From another study, it was found that pre-service teachers enter the profession because of altruistic motives [11]. Furthermore, Excellent teachers are willing to share their knowledge and skills with other teachers [1].

3.1.5 Student engagement

Item 46 had a mean score of 3.52 with 56% responded that the it is very important for Excellent teachers to engage students in active learning. 40 % respondents rated this item as important. 4% of the respondents rated the item as not very important. This item is ranked at 7th place when comparing the mean scores. Slightly more than half of the respondents rated this item as very important, however, with 4% of the respondent, it influences the mean score to be lower.

The finding from this study regarding student engagement seems to show that it's ranking in the mean score is lowest 4 in the list. It implies that student engagement is not as a high priority as other items. This seems to be in line with the issue that there is a need to further research teachers understanding of what entail engagement in these three constructs [18]. There seems to be a misunderstanding as to what entails student engagement among teachers [18]. Student engagement is divided into three construct that is Cognitive, Behavioural and Emotional engagement and teachers' role in establishing and maintaining student engagement is crucial [18]. From previous research [Dickerson], it was found that pupils tend to be more comfortable with passive learning as active learning is something unfamiliar. Also, in terms of engagements with pupils, teachers are burned with work load of the school [22]. Student engagement is important as students who are engaged have a great learning attainment that is 6 months ahead of their current level. Performance of the students are affected by engagement [8].

3.1.6 Student centred

Item 40 had a mean score of 3.48 with 56% responded that it is very important that Excellent Teachers know the cognitive ability of the students whom they teach. 36% of the respondents rated the item as important. 8% of the responded the items as not very important which is much higher than item 46 (Student Engagement). The mean score of this item places it at 8th in the timetable.

The finding of this study showed that knowing the cognitive ability of the student in terms of mean score is at the bottom two of the list of items. This implies that the teachers do not prioritise this action as important as the others. It is possible that it has not become a priority as streaming based on academic achievement is practiced in Malaysia. Also, the level of thinking skills incorporated in book are not Higher order thinking skills. Most primary school begins with students being assessed and group into classes [13]. Identifying students' cognitive ability is already done earlier, thus less work for teachers to identify their students, though findings in another study teachers aware of different

ability of the students to understand concepts [20]. In a primary school textbook analysis by, it was found that cognitive domain of knowing is predominant [21]. From previous studies, although teachers are aware of cognitive abilities of the students, they may be constrained by the syllabus and class organisation.

Items pertaining to Personal Belief is found to have the highest mean scores. Items regarding classroom environment had the 2nd highest mean score. As for Content Knowledge, the mean score places it in the middle range of the mean scores. Surprisingly items pertaining to Students Engagement and Students Centred is among the bottom 5 of the mean scores. Multiple previous researches have shown that among the criteria prioritised in looking at Excellent Teachers are "Student-Centred" and "Teaching Strategies" [2,5,6,9,10,17,23]. Data from this research revealed a contradictory finding. The English Teachers view the criterion pertaining to the teachers themselves as the as the highest criterion, that is Personal Belief. This is followed by Classroom Environment, Content Knowledge and finally followed by Student Engagement and Students Centred.

4. Conclusion

The English Teachers' response to the questionnaire has given insight as to what teachers view as criteria of Excellent English Teachers. From analysis of the mean score, 10 items had high mean scores between 3.45 to 3.65. The highest items pertained to Personal Belief then followed by Classroom Environment. The 5 highest mean score of the items highlights that the respondents of the study emphasise on the personal beliefs, students' environment and teacher's knowledge. Items for Professional Development have a middle range mean score and lowest mean scores among the 10 items. This study would be significant to the policymakers and educators alike. This study would serve as a guide for compiling a framework of English Excellent Teachers.

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