



What makes a good EFL teacher: A reference for language teacher education

Anh Tuan Pham^{a 1} 

^a FPT University, Can Tho, Vietnam

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the qualities of a good English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teacher perceived by English language teachers and EFL students at a Vietnamese university. The study also investigates how teachers and students perceived the qualities of a good EFL teacher and differences in teachers' and students' views on these qualities. Mixed-method research was employed under the participation of 22 teachers of English and 80 English-majored students. The study was based on the English Teacher Competency Framework (ETCF) by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2008) in Vietnam. The results revealed that both teachers and students perceived knowledge of language teaching as the most considerable ($M=4.28/5.0$, $SD=.38$). Although teachers' and students' perceptions had major similarities, there were some differences between their views from quantitative and qualitative findings. From the findings, it is suggested to provide a reference and standards for language teachers, teacher trainers, and policymakers regarding EFL teacher training programs in every educational institution.

Keywords: good EFL teacher; qualities; perceptions; reference; teacher education

1. Introduction

The quality of education in an educational institution has been significantly affected by the quality of lecturers or teachers and instructors (Sitanggang et al., 2021). Specifically, in language learning, student's academic achievements and outcomes have been influenced by teachers' performance in their profession and their language proficiency (Campbell et al., 2004; Köksal & Ulum, 2019). Students and teachers also have a tight relationship in which language teachers give students input as the main source (Kariminia & Salehizadeh, 2007).

Although many studies on the qualities of a good EFL teacher have been conducted, these studies just focused on some traits such as knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogical knowledge, and social-affective skills (Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Borg, 2006; Park & Lee, 2006; Wichadee & Orawiwatnakul, 2012). In language teaching and learning context, while teacher education programs are applied to help teachers improve their pedagogic and linguistic competence, it is significant to examine the qualities of a good EFL teacher, which are perceived by both teachers of English and students of English (Karim et al., 2019). In fact, in Vietnam, investigating these qualities from

¹ Corresponding author.

E-mail address: anhpt66@fe.edu.vn

different views of the participants are essential for several reasons. Firstly, the results of the study are expected to help teachers check their appropriateness in language teaching and learning and understand students' expectations through their feedback and reflections in order to make some timely and suitable changes of classroom practice and beliefs for their professional development (Mustafa & Paçarizi, 2021). Plus, students of English would change their thoughts and build up themselves as good EFL teacher since many students of English would become teachers of English after graduating from university. Moreover, both teachers and students could contribute the same voice for language teaching and learning innovation in Vietnam. Finally, the results are in hope of helping educational authorities, policymakers, and teacher educators to assess EFL teachers' competency for the quality of English language education in Vietnam.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 A good teacher

Researchers and educators have defined a good teacher in different ways. Neil (1991) stated that a good teacher should be related to the two crucial components in the teaching and learning process called teacher knowledge of subject matter and skills that help teach that subject. Besides, Lowman (1995) described two main dimensions of good teaching underlying good teachers, including the teacher's ability to stimulate intellectual excitement and the use of psychology in the classroom. In another study, a good teacher is related to effective communication, a pleasant learning atmosphere, worries and care for student learning, student motivation, and organization of the course (Young & Shaw, 1999). Moreover, a good teacher can promote positive student emotions as well as critical thinking and creativity, being sensitive to students' feelings and maintaining respect (Wichadee & Orawiwatnakul, 2012). Good teachers have been described as active teachers. They are encouraged to make good use of time for conducting a lesson, lesson presenting skills, leading classroom activities in order to help students acquire new concepts (Clarke & Watts-Taffe, 2014). Teachers should have good knowledge of subject matters and techniques to help students improve analytical and critical skills (Lavy, 2016).

1.1.2 A good language teacher

Three main qualities of a good language teacher as being principled and knowledgeable, skillful and self-improved professional needs and developing their profession for quality improvement of education were mentioned by Pettis (1997). Moreover, declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge are vital elements to identify what a good language teacher is (Griffie & Nunan, 1997). Borg (2006) distinguished good EFL teachers with teachers of other subjects in actual classroom practices, presented as the subject matter itself, interaction to provide instruction, increasing their knowledge, isolation and outside support to help teachers learn the subject. Other common qualities are conceptualized on teaching and learning practice from language teachers, including language proficiency (Göksel & Rakıcioğlu-Söylemez, 2018), the importance of content knowledge, teaching skills, knowledge of context, language teacher's identity, learner-centered teaching pedagogical skills, theorizing from practice, community membership and professionalism (Richards, 2010). Importantly, the qualities of a good language teacher were investigated in different countries, which fall into four main categories as English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge (Stella & Dimitris, 2013; Johnson, 2016), socio-affective skills (Park & Lee, 2006; Göksel & Rakıcioğlu-Söylemez, 2018) and organization and communication skills (Zamani & Ahangari, 2016).

1.1.3 Theoretical framework

In Vietnam, EFL teachers have been evaluated and graded by a theoretical frame which is considered as a standard to identify a good EFL teacher. The English Teacher Competency Framework

(ETCF) for pre-service EFL teacher education programs was proposed and developed by MOET (2012), and attached to the National Foreign Language 2020 Project (MOET, 2008). The framework is based on some international language teacher standards documents consisting of the Common European Framework Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), the ACTFL Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers (ACTFL, 2006), TESOL/NCATE Teacher Education Standards (TESOL, 2010), the European Portfolio of Student Teachers of Languages (Newby et al., 2007). The framework is categorized into 5 domains as displayed:

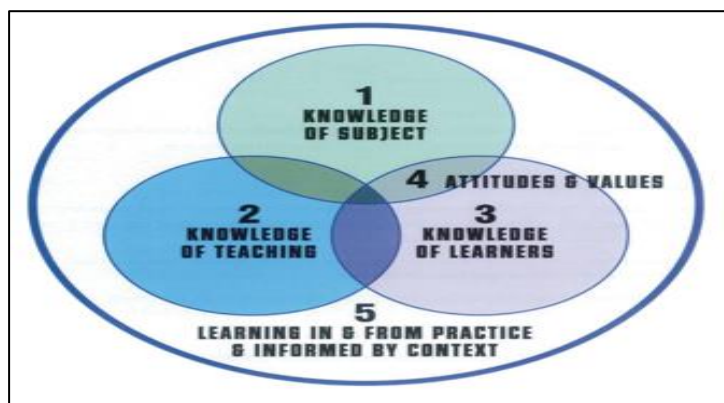


Figure 1. The English Teacher Competency Framework (ETCF)

1.2 Research questions

The study aimed to examine the perceptions of teachers and students on the qualities of a good EFL teacher and whether there were differences in their views. Specifically, the answers for the following questions were sought:

1. To what extent do teachers and students perceive the qualities of a good EFL teacher?
2. Do teachers and students have the same views on the qualities of a good EFL teacher?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were chosen by a random sampling technique with a total number of 102, consisting of 22 English teachers aged 28-40 and 80 English-majored students aged 18-22 at a Vietnamese university. At the time of conducting the study, English teachers had at least 5 years of teaching experience while students were in their third and fourth year of university.

2.2 Instruments

A mixed-method approach (Hesse-Biber, 2010) - quantitative and qualitative - was adopted to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions of the qualities of a good EFL teacher.

For a quantitative method, a 26-question questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale (Preedy & Watson, 2010) from 1 as "strongly disagree" to 5 as "strongly agree" was used, in which the questions were designed and followed the ETCF.

For a qualitative method, a semi-structured interview was employed to gain a deeper understanding of the qualities of a good EFL teacher. A purposive sampling technique was used since the researcher

wanted to select only targeted individuals who are knowledgeable and experienced in the focus (Flick, 2009).

To verify the validity of the research instruments, the questionnaire and interview questions were submitted to five specialists and supervisors in language education. Received feedbacks were then considered for making changes before administering the research instruments.

To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, the SPSS software was employed to analyse the data. Initially, the questionnaire was piloted with 33 participants one week before administering the official questionnaire. The Cronbach Alpha (α) value of the piloted questionnaire was .91. Following this, the questionnaire was officially administered to 102 participants. The result of Cronbach Alpha (α) was .86. From the above-mentioned process, it was indicated that the questionnaire was considered reliable.

2.3 Data collection procedures and data analysis

After asking for participants' permission, the questionnaire was sent to the participants via Google Forms. It took approximately 15 minutes to complete it. The collected data were analysed by SPSS software with a Descriptive Statistic Test, a One-Sample T-test and an Independent T-test. Following this, six participants (three teachers and three students) were invited for in-depth interviews, whose mean scores were perceived highest according to the quantitative analysis. The interviews were carried out in either English or Vietnamese, then manually coded and transcribed thematically. The interview questions mainly focused on five major domains in the ETCF. Each interview took nearly 20 minutes.

3. Results

3.1 Results collected from the questionnaire

The questionnaires were analysed thematically based on 5 domains in the ETCF.

Table 1. Participants' perceptions on the qualities of a good EFL teacher

Domains	N	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	SD
1. Knowledge of language subject	102	2.71	4.86	3.91	.37
2. Knowledge of language teaching	102	3.17	5.00	4.28	.38
3. Knowledge of language learners	102	2.80	5.00	3.88	.41
4. Professional attitudes and values in language teaching	102	3.00	4.80	3.84	.37
5. Learning in and from practice and informed by context	102	2.33	4.67	3.52	.46
General Mean	102	2.96	4.81	3.93	.31

Table 1 reveals that the overall mean score of the participants performed in the questionnaire was at a high level ($M = 3.93$). The One-sample t-test was also used and the result showed that all of the mean scores were significantly different from 4.0 ($p < 0.05$). The computed mean scores were significantly higher than the average mean score of the 5-point Likert scale ($M = 3.0$). The result indicated that participants highly appreciated the qualities which a good EFL teacher should obtain. More importantly, knowledge of language teaching was most perceived. The level of importance could be arranged as follows: 1) knowledge of language teaching ($M = 4.28$), 2) knowledge of language subject ($M = 3.91$), 3) knowledge of language learners ($M = 3.88$), 4) professional attitudes and values

in language teaching ($M = 3.84$), and 5) learning in and from practice and informed by context ($M = 3.52$).

However, to investigate some similarities and differences in teachers' and students' perceptions on the qualities of a good EFL teacher, a Descriptive Statistical test and an Independent t-test were employed.

3.1.1. Results from domain 1 "knowledge of language subject"

Table 2. Teachers and students' perceptions on knowledge of the language, language learning and curriculum

	Group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	SD
Domain 1	teachers	22	3.71	4.86	4.11	.29
	students	80	2.71	4.71	3.85	.37

The result from Table 2 shows that the mean score of teachers' perceptions ($M = 4.11$) on Domain 1 was slightly higher than that of students' ($M = 3.85$). Moreover, an independent t-test was applied to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in perceptions of the qualities of a good EFL teacher towards the domain between teacher and student participants. The test result was significantly confirmed ($t = -3.446$; $df = 40.976$; $p < .05$). The results indicated that teachers perceived higher than students in terms of knowledge of language subjects.

3.1.2. Results from domain 2 "knowledge of language teaching"

Table 3. Teachers and students' perceptions on knowledge of language teaching

	Group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	SD
Domain 2	teachers	22	3.83	5.00	4.47	.37
	students	80	3.17	4.83	4.23	.37

The analysis from Table 3 reveals that the mean score of teachers' perceptions ($M = 4.47$) on this domain was quite higher than that of students' ($M = 4.23$). In addition, an independent t-test was employed to investigate whether there was a significant difference in perceptions of the qualities of a good EFL teacher in terms of knowledge of language teaching between teacher and student participants. The result was significantly confirmed ($t = -2.675$; $df = 33.818$; $p < .05$). The results proved that teachers' perceptions were also at a higher level than students' ones in this domain. In fact, the results suggested that a good EFL teacher should obtain a qualification which was understood as language teaching methodologies.

3.1.3. Results from domain 3 "knowledge of language learners"

Table 4. Teachers and students' perceptions on knowledge of language learners

	Group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	SD
Domain 3	teachers	22	3.40	5.00	4.20	.40
	students	80	2.80	4.60	3.80	.36

Table 4 describes the mean score of teachers' perceptions ($M = 4.20$) on this domain was slightly higher than that of students' ($M = 3.80$). An independent t-test was employed to examine whether

there was a significant difference in teachers' and students' perceptions on the domain of knowledge of language learners. The test result showed its significance ($t = -4.258$; $df = 31.277$; $p < .05$). The results implied that teachers employed slightly stronger perceptions than students in this domain.

3.1.4. Results from domain 4 "professional attitudes and values in language teaching"

Table 5. Teachers and students' perceptions on professional attitudes and values in language teaching

	Group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	SD
Domain 4	teachers	22	3.60	4.80	4.10	.35
	students	80	3.00	4.60	3.77	.34

Table 5 shows the mean score of teachers' perceptions ($M = 4.10$) on this domain was more positive than that of students' ($M = 3.77$). Moreover, the result of the independent t-test conducted shows a significant difference in both groups toward their perceptions ($t = -3.919$; $df = 32.287$; $p < .05$). The results revealed that teachers showed higher appreciation than students when considering this domain.

3.1.5. Results from domain 5 "learning in and from practice and informed by context"

Table 6. Teachers and students' perceptions on practice and context of language teaching

	Group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	SD
Domain 5	teachers	22	3.00	4.67	3.94	.41
	students	80	2.33	4.00	3.41	.41

As can be seen from Table 6, teachers' perceptions ($M = 3.94$) on the domain of practice and context of language teaching were achieved at a rather higher level than students' ones ($M = 3.41$). Moreover, the result from the independent t-test confirmed that their perceptions were significantly different ($t = -5.412$; $df = 33.723$; $p < .05$). The results indicated that teachers obtained a higher rate in their perceptions towards the domain.

3.2 Results collected from the interview questions

All participants (100%) supported that a good EFL teacher should possess all above-analysed qualities. However, to find out some reasons why the participants perceived those qualities to re-confirm the results of the quantitative method.

3.2.1. Knowledge of language subject

When being asked about the importance of knowledge of the English language, 5 out of 6 participants (83.33%) completely agreed that teachers should have a high level of English language proficiency and know the English language system (sounds, word part, word meaning, word order, etc.) very well was beneficial because teachers could help students learn better with clear and easy-to-understand explanations for some difficult questions about the English language. Teachers clarified that they must achieve at least C1 (effective operational proficiency or advanced) following the CEFR before they became EFL teachers. Moreover, teachers must strictly follow the syllabi and curriculum assigned by their administrators in their institutions. Teacher C stated:

An EFL teacher must achieve a required level of English, as I know it is C1 for high school and college teachers of English. They also have linguistic knowledge because if they don't know the system of English, they may not know how to explain some English rules clearly. For example, teachers need to know English grammar, pronunciation and meaning very well to explain when students ask a question about any of them. The curriculum is just like a frame that has to follow. Teachers aren't allowed to change the syllabi since their schools asked them to follow the curriculum.

3.2.2. Knowledge of language teaching

All of the interviewees (100%) highly supported that teaching methodology was essential because an appropriate teaching approach could help teachers achieve the lesson objectives as well as lead a successful lesson with an interesting language learning environment. Teacher A said:

Before becoming an EFL teacher, I was trained with different teaching methods and approaches as Grammar-Translation, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-based Learning (TBL) and so on. I sometimes combine them in one lesson to meet the requirements of each lesson. Every day, I want to help my students improve their language skills and feel excited in my class.

Student B also added:

I think it is important because teachers have to choose a modern teaching approach to help students communicate in English better. If they have good knowledge of teaching methodologies, they know how to teach, organize classroom and class activities and use proper strategies in teaching.

3.2.3. Knowledge of language learners

5 out of 6 interviewees (83.33%) had similar opinions that it was necessary for an EFL teacher to know their students very well in order to foster good language teaching. In fact, they supported that students were diverse and from different backgrounds, so teachers need to have more understanding of their students to get them motivated in learning English as well as to help teachers design more appropriate classroom activities. Teacher B described:

Teachers should know what students like or dislike to help teachers to select what they will teach because students will feel more interested in the content which they are favourable. Students are different, and they are from different families with different personality traits, so we need to understand their styles to make teaching most suitable to them. Moreover, students don't want to lose their face when they make a mistake, so giving direct feedback sometimes hurts their feelings.

3.2.4. Professional attitudes and values in language teaching

More teachers (83.33%) than students (66.66%) supported the teachers should show professional attitudes and values in their profession because they must be good role models for students, dedicated to a teaching career and gain respect from students. Teacher A mentioned:

I always keep my self-image as a serious teacher, and doing good things as students will follow me as a role model. Teaching career is prioritized in our culture, so we should obtain good attitudes toward teaching and learning language to help our students. When we try hard and make effort to bring students good lessons, students respect us more.

3.2.5. Learning in and from practice and informed by context

Many interviewees (66.66%) agreed that teachers should understand what their teaching context is because it could help teachers apply appropriate teaching methods and approaches as required in a course syllabus. Moreover, they thought that it was not necessary to apply a certain method in teaching beyond different countries. Student C presented:

I learn English in my country, but I don't use it for speaking often. If my teacher knows about the real teaching context, they can teach me how to improve other skills which are more realistic if I work

in my country. So, if my teacher applies the same method from another country, it is difficult for us to learn it because a new teaching method that is successful in a country may not be successful when it is applied in a Vietnamese context. Cultures and the setting may affect the way Vietnamese students learn English and Vietnamese teachers teach English, too.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the study highlighted significant implementations of the ETCF as standards for EFL teachers in Vietnam particularly. The qualities of a good EFL teacher were highly perceived by both teachers and students. Specifically, in terms of *knowledge of language teaching*, both teachers and students showed the most appreciation to identify a good EFL teacher. The finding was in line with (Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Park & Lee, 2006). It is suggested that EFL teachers should focus more on enhancing their teaching methodologies to meet the lesson objectives. Moreover, *knowledge of language subject* was highly appreciated since teachers had to achieve a required level of English language efficiency with a C1 to be qualified for an EFL teaching position in an institution in Vietnam. This finding was also in accordance with the studies by Borg (2006), Park and Lee (2006), and Göksel and Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez (2018). For the other qualities as *knowledge of language learners*, *professional attitudes and values in teaching*, and *learning in and from practice and informed by context*, teachers and students similarly supported that it was a must to examine a good EFL teacher as a whole. However, the results also revealed that teachers showed a slightly higher appreciation than students toward the qualities of a good EFL teacher. In other words, teachers were aware of these qualities more apparently as required qualifications. In fact, teachers knew what and who they were in their teaching profession in order to make effort for effective language teaching.

In conclusion, although there have been different definitions of a good EFL teacher in many studies, it is suggested from the study that teachers and students should gain an insight into these qualities. Teachers would improve themselves to meet standards for an EFL teacher, and students would be aware of who they are working with. When all views are matched, the quality of English language teaching is likely to advance itself in Vietnam.

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AUTHOR BIODATA

Anh Tuan Pham is currently working as an English lecturer at FPT University, Vietnam. His research interests include professional and educational development, EFL/ESL teaching methodologies, translation and interpretation, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic methodologies, and ICT in education.