The Characteristics of Effective English Language Teachers as Perceived by Students and Teachers of a Higher Secondary School in Bhutan

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Abstract

This paper identifies characteristics of effective English language teachers as perceived by both language teachers and students of a Higher Secondary School in Bhutan. Participants consisted of two randomly selected groups. The first included 8 Bhutanese English teachers and one Indian English teacher, while the second included 10 twelfth grade and 10 eleventh grade high school students from a Higher Secondary School. The data were collected by means of a self-report questionnaire consisting of three categories: English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills. In general, the students' perception on the characteristics of effective English language teachers are comparatively different from the teachers' perception with the students ranking English proficiency the highest in contrast to the teachers grading socio-affective skills the highest. However, both the students and the teachers marked pedagogical knowledge the least. The findings have implications both for current and prospective English teachers.

Keywords: Effective English Language Teachers, English Proficiency, Pedagogical Knowledge, Socio-affective Skills

Introduction

In order for English language teachers to effectively pass messages to the learners, it is important for the teachers to teach effectively and to do so, it is equally important to understand the characteristics of effective English language teachers not only from their own perspectives but also from students'. Park, G & Lee, H (2006) opine that these characteristics consist of several underlying constructs including subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills. Borg (2006) states that the nature of the subject, the content of teaching, methodology, teacher-learner relationship, issues related to being native or non-native speaker of the language, and teachers' personal characteristics affect the identification of effective language teacher characteristics. Generally, English language teachers' reading proficiency, speaking proficiency, the ability to arouse students' interest, motivate, and inspire are also widely believed as the necessary characteristics of English language teachers (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Ramazani, 2014).

There are number of studies conducted outside Bhutanese context to find out the characteristics of effective English language teachers from the perspectives of either students or teachers but not both. In specific few, among many of these, are targeted on high school students as almost all the studies are carried out from the perspectives of university students. Moreover, there are only countable number of studies conducted in the

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2-A004-p19-27.indd 19 31-07-2020 20:22:13

Bhutanese context. Hence, it was felt necessary to survey and find out the characteristics of effective English language teachers in Bhutan from the perspectives of both teachers and students, particularly from a Higher Secondary School.

Therefore, with a purpose to define the characteristics of effective English teachers in terms of subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills, and to compare the characteristics of effective English teachers perceived by different parties of students and teachers, the following three research questions were addressed to guide this study:

1. What are the characteristics of Effective English Teachers as perceived by students?
2. What are the characteristics of Effective English Teachers as perceived by teachers?
3. How is students' perception of Effective English Teachers different from teachers' perception of Effective English Teachers?

Literature Review

There are enough researches conducted to study the characteristics of effective English teachers in various contexts. Buchmann (1984) stated that teachers' command of a foreign language made it possible to use the target language in class, personalize lessons according to students' backgrounds, and facilitate effective lesson planning.

English language proficiency cannot be transmitted to learners if teachers are not equipped with proper pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 1986). Shulman (1986) claimed that pedagogical knowledge included ideas, concepts, analogies, explanations, and demonstrations used to make the subject matter comprehensible to students.

Studies conducted by Brosh (1996) and Molica & Nuessel (1997) defined socio-affective skills as a trait central to effective teacher characteristics. The importance of these skills has been further recognized by Krashen (1985) and Long (1996). Thus, even though socio-affective skills overlap with pedagogical knowledge in a broad sense, these skills are worth being discussed as an independent category rather than discussed under the category of pedagogical knowledge.

With interviews and a questionnaire consisting of 20 items of teacher characteristics, Brosh (1996) acknowledged the characteristics of effective English language teachers as perceived by high school teachers and students in Israel. While both groups attributed the highest importance to items regarding commanding the target language and teaching comprehensibly, neither the teachers nor the students endorsed items regarding positive attitudes toward native speakers and teaching in the target language. Moreover, the teachers gave more importance than students to items related to developing motivation and research orientation, but the students gave more weight than teachers to items related to treating students fairly and making lessons interesting.

In order to study the characteristics of effective English as foreign language teachers, Park, G and Lee, H (2006) conducted a survey from the perspective of 169 teachers and 339 students in a South Korean school. Their findings showed mismatches between students' and teachers' perspectives. Teachers rated English proficiency higher than pedagogical knowledge while students gave pedagogical knowledge more

2-A004-p19-27.indd 20 31-07-2020 20:22:13

importance than English proficiency. Socio-affective skills was rated the least among the three categories by both the groups of respondents.

Chen & Lin (2009) surveyed effective EFL teacher characteristics. 198 students in Tainan and Taiwan responded to the 50-item questionnaire which comprised of effective EFL teacher characteristics such as instructional competence, personality, and teacher-student relationship. Teachers' personality was rated as the most important characteristic by the respondents followed by teacher-student relationship in the second rank. Finally instructional competence received the lowest ratings. There were some disagreements between male and female students, but the study revealed teachers' enthusiasm to teach English, friendliness, open-mindedness, respectfulness, and caring about students as the most important effective English language teacher characteristics.

Barnes & Lock's (2010) qualitative study employed a free writing instrument on 105 freshmen studying at a women's university in Korea. Their finding reported rapport as the most important effective English language teacher characteristic, followed by delivery, fairness, and knowledge and credibility. Furthermore, organization and preparation was rated as the least important characteristic.

There are also few studies conducted in the context of Bhutan. Ministry of Education (2013) conducted a nation-wide *Educating for Gross National Happiness* (GNH) program in 2010 for all teachers across the country to acquire qualities like faithfulness, resourcefulness, punctuality, patience, and interdependence, in order to benefit themselves, their families, workplaces, and local and global communities.

Sherab (2013) conducted an action research on behavioural and cognitive engagement of 29 teacher-trainees in Bhutan. His study reported that teachers' characteristics such as being approachable and caring, and ability to provide active learning opportunities in the class enhanced both behavioural and cognitive engagement of students in the class.

A similar study conducted by Puntai and Wangchuk (2015) surveyed the characteristics of effective English language teachers on 177 students in Bhutan. They found attributes like rapport, fairness, delivery, and organization and preparation as the most important characteristics of effective English teachers in Bhutan. Teachers' knowledge and credibility were also revealed as important characteristics.

Wangchuk (2017) used a semi-structured interview consisting of a set of self-prepared questions for a group of six students who were selected from the total students studying in grade 11 and 12 (research site) using purposive sampling technique. The questions were developed to elicit richer and deeper information about these participants' preferences of ESL teacher characteristics during the face-to-face interviews with them. Besides asking these questions, additional questions were also asked to clarify some of their unclear responses. Part II of the essay writing asked the other six participants (also selected using purposive sampling technique) to write an essay each on effective ESL teacher characteristics to collate and support the data obtained from the semi-structured interview. The analyses of his study revealed three distinct characteristics: ESL teachers' personal qualities, subject-related knowledge, and professional characteristics as effective ESL teacher characteristics.

This present study defined and investigated characteristics of effective English language teachers from the perspective of students and teachers of a higher secondary school in Bhutan. The findings from this study provide a comprehension into effective characteristics of effective English teachers which would be useful for the teachers to consider for them to teach students effectively.

2-A004-p19-27.indd 21 31-07-2020 20:22:13

Research Method

This quantitative research method aimed at obtaining information about effective English Language teachers from both students' and teachers' perceptions of a higher secondary school in Bhutan. The present study hypothesized the following three questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Effective English Teachers as perceived by teachers?
2. What are the characteristics of Effective English Teachers as perceived by students?
3. How is teachers' perception of Effective English Teachers different from students' perception of Effective English Teachers?

Participants

Participants of this study were from three groups. The first group of participants were a team of English teachers. There were two male teachers (one was from India and he has taught in Bhutan for 32 years while the other, the Bhutanese teacher, has taught English for ten years) and four female teachers (they have been teaching English to various classes for more than 15 years).

The second group consisted of ten Class twelve students and ten Class eleven students out of which were ten girls and ten boys. Two participants each (one boy and one girl) from each section of Class 12 Science (section A and B), 12 Commerce (Section C and D) and 12 Arts/Media Studies (Section E) and two participants each (one boy and one girl) from each section of Class 11 Science (section A and B), 11 Commerce (Section C and D), 11 Arts/Media Studies (Section E) participated in this study.

All the participants were recruited, based on their willingness and interest to share their thoughts and feelings on effective English language teachers' characteristics.

Data Collection & Analysis

With reference to the data collection, the author personally contacted each of them and enquired whether they would have enough time to complete a questionnaire each. All of them agreed.

In case of the students, the author explained briefly the nature of this study and asked their cooperation by responding to the questionnaire sincerely and honestly. After ensuring their cooperation, the author explained how to answer the questionnaire which had no right or wrong answers. The students were encouraged to ask questions if the meaning of the items were not clear to them. The questionnaires were distributed during the first class in the morning and were told to submit by the end of the day.

Both teachers and students were assured that their responses to the questionnaires would be kept confidential and not be used for other purposes.

Table 1 Scores for the Three Categories

Categories	Students (in %)	Teachers (in %)
English proficiency	94.73	86.97
Pedagogical knowledge	87.5	86.66
Socio-affective skills	90.2	88.42

2-A004-p19-27.indd 22 31-07-2020 20:22:13

The characteristics of effective English teachers as perceived by different groups were compared on categorical levels: English Proficiency, Pedagogical Knowledge and Socio-affective Skills.

Results

The findings of this study were described with the focus on group comparisons of effective teacher characteristics contributing to students' learning between and within the three categories: English proficiency, Pedagogical Knowledge, and Socio-affective Skills. It is worth mentioning that any conclusions made in these findings should be interpreted with caution because the data were collected at one point in time from one higher secondary school in Bhutan.

Between Categories

For the analyses between categories, the total scores (in %) for the three categories were computed to find the relative importance of the categories, as seen in Table 1. Interestingly, the teachers endorsed Socio-affective Skills, English Proficiency, and Pedagogical Knowledge in order of importance, whereas the students endorsed English Proficiency, Socio-affective Skills, and Pedagogical Knowledge.

The students' higher ranking of teachers' English Proficiency over Pedagogical Knowledge and Socio-affective Skills might be that they wanted the teachers to transfer the message effectively without any inhibitions about how they teach. On the other hand, the teachers might have found teaching easier with those students who have good relations with them. Surprisingly, both the students and the teachers rated Pedagogical Knowledge the lowest and they might have taken this for granted.

Within Category: English Proficiency

The total scores for the items in English Proficiency were computed to investigate the relative importance of the items perceived by each group, as seen in Table 2. In the comparison between the students and the teachers, both groups rated speaking proficiency the highest. The significant difference between the two

Table 2 Total scores for the Items in English Proficiency as Perceived by Each Group (in %)

Item Number	Items	Students	Teachers
	An effective English teacher is someone who:		
1	understands spoken English well	88.75	91.66
2	knows English culture well.	80	62.5
3	reads English well.	91.25	91.66
4	has a high level of proficiency with English vocabulary.	92.5	91.66
5	writes English well.	91.25	91.66
6	pronounces English well.	88.75	87.5
7	speaks English well.	93.75	91.66
8	is fully conversant with English grammar.	93.75	87.5

2-A004-p19-27.indd 23 31-07-2020 20:22:13

groups is **knows English culture well** where students and teachers rated (80) and (62.5) respectively. They might have thought it was not important for teachers to know English culture so long as they speak well. In general, the effective teacher characteristics of English Proficiency perceived by the students and teachers are similar to each other.

Within Category: Pedagogical Knowledge

Table 3 shows the mean scores for the 10 effective teacher characteristics in the category of Pedagogical Knowledge reported by each group. Teachers rated – providing activities that arouse students'– interest in learning English (95.83) and teaching English in English (95.83) the highest while students rated providing opportunities to use English through meaningful activities the highest (90). Teachers might have felt that teaching English in English would keep track of students' attention in English without diverting to any other language but the students yearn for meaningful activities because activity based teaching must be keeping them active throughout the lesson.

With (75 each), students and teachers graded – **teaches English tailored to students' English proficiency levels and maintains good classroom atmosphere using authority, if necessary** – the least. Teachers might have conceived that there was no need, in any capacity, to use authority to maintain good classroom.

The maximum difference between the two groups is found in teaching how to learn English outside the classroom. Students might have found learning outside the classroom without the guidance of teachers challenging.

Table 3 Total scores for the Items in Pedagogical Knowledge as Perceived by each Group (in %)

Item Number	Items	Students	Teachers
	An effective English teacher is someone who:		
1	prepares the lesson well.	82.5	79.16
2	teaches how to learn English outside the classroom (ex. watching the BBS programs etc.).	80	91.66
3	uses various materials including video, audio, and multimedia.	78.75	87.5
4	teaches English tailored to students' English proficiency levels.	75	83.33
5	maintains good classroom atmosphere using authority, if necessary.	76.25	75
6	teaches English in English.	86.25	95.83
7	assesses what students have learned rationally.	80	83.33
8	teaches English incorporating student's various learning styles (ex. intravertive and extravertive learning styles).	81.25	83.33
9	provides opportunities to use English through meaningful activities.	90	91.66
10	provides activities that arouse students' interest in learning English.	86.25	95.83

2-A004-p19-27.indd 24 31-07-2020 20:22:13

Within Category: Socio-affective Skills

Table 4 shows the mean scores for the individual items in the category of Socio-affective Skills perceived by each group. Students ranked-- **helps students' self-confidence in learning English well**-- the maximum (93.75) but teachers ranked-- **is helpful to students in and outside the classroom (100)**-- the maximum. While students might have found easier to learn from teachers who help their self-confidence in learning English, teachers might have experienced helping students both in and outside the classroom effective.

Table 4 **Total scores for the Items in Socio-affective Skills as perceived by each Group (in %)**

Item Number	Items	Students	Teachers
	An effective English teacher is someone who:		
1	is helpful to students in and outside the classroom	85	100
2	alleviates students' anxiety in English class.	76.31	83.33
3	listens to students' opinions.	91.25	95.83
4	helps students' self-confidence in learning English well.	93.75	95.83
5	is friendly to students.	88.75	87.5
6	has a good sense of humour.	87.5	83.33
7	Does not discriminate among students and treats them fairly.	90	91.66
8	arouses students' motivation for learning English.	87.5	95.83
9	has interest in students (example -- remembering students' names) and students' English learning.	78.75	83.33

Although alleviating students' anxiety in English class is rated the lowest both by the students (76.31) and teachers (83.33), the difference between the two groups is remarkable (7.02).

Conclusion & Discussion

This study examined the characteristics of effective English teachers as perceived by higher secondary school students and teachers in Bhutan through a self-report questionnaire consisting of three categories of effective teaching: English proficiency, Pedagogical Knowledge, and Socio-affective Skills. In general, the students' perception of the characteristics of effective English teachers is significantly different from the teachers in all three characteristics with the students ranking English Proficiency the highest and the teachers ranking Socio-affective Skills the highest.

These findings have the following implications for current and prospective English teachers in Bhutan. First, considering the student's higher validation of English Proficiency over Pedagogical Knowledge and Socio-affective Skills, in-service and pre-service teacher education programs should focus on improving teachers' English proficiency. Buchmann (1984) stated that the importance of English teachers' English

2-A004-p19-27.indd 25 31-07-2020 20:22:14

proficiency cannot be overemphasized because teachers' high proficiency of the target language is necessary to accommodate students' proficiency levels and learning styles in class. This statement leads to a fundamental question: What is the foreign language teachers' optimal proficiency level of a target language? Regrettably, there is no clearly defined professional consensus about this level. However, in-service teachers can be provided with frequent workshops and language courses including the four skills and the Colleges of Education in Bhutan can continue to drill and equip the pre-service trainee teachers with English language proficiency activities.

Second, the teachers' higher endorsement of Socio-affective Skills over English Proficiency and Pedagogical Knowledge implies that teachers should be interactive and helpful beyond the school hours also, in order to help their students learn English effectively. For this, college courses for prospective teachers should be oriented more toward Socio-affective Skills development rather than English Proficiency and Pedagogical Knowledge. Unluckily, the reverse is true in the Colleges of Education in Bhutan with more focus on pedagogy and teaching strategies. For in-service teachers, they should keep up with current social skills by taking short-term training courses, participating in conferences and seminars, and by pursuing higher degrees in developing social skills. This teacher-student relationship approach to teaching will contribute to student learning as well as to the advancement of the domain.

Third, the students' perceptions regarding effective English teachers were significantly different from those held by the teachers. The inconsistency between the perceptions held by the two parties can cause the students to resist the teaching methods and approaches used by their teachers and, in turn, can lead to ineffectiveness in their learning. For instance, the teachers who consider English Proficiency less important and focus more on Socio-affective Skills and Pedagogy can be rejected by the students who believe in the importance of English proficiency.

However, this study is by no means complete and has limitations. Since the data was collected and analysed at one point in time, the conclusions made above should be interpreted with caution. Therefore, following areas can be explored in future research. First, the quantitative findings of this study should be replicated by other participants across academic levels and investigated further through in-depth qualitative analysis. Second, the fundamental reasons for different perceptions regarding effective English teachers held by different groups should be investigated. Third, the relationship between students' perceptions regarding effective English teachers and their achievement needs to be further explored. The findings of this and future studies will contribute to more complete teacher education for English teachers in Bhutan.

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2-A004-p19-27.indd 26 31-07-2020 20:22:14

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2-A004-p19-27.indd 27 31-07-2020 20:22:14