Libyan Student Teachers' Perceptions on the Attributes of the Effective EFL Teachers

Libya Öğrencilerinin Öğretmenlerin Etkili EFL Öğretmenlerinin Niteliklerine İlişkin Algıları

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Abstract

Given the undeniable influence of effective language teachers on successful language teaching and learning practices, this study was set out to address the attributes of effective language teachers based on Libyan university level student teachers' perception. A multi-method approach including both qualitative and quantitative means of data collection was employed in the study. Results indicated that Libyan student teachers placed high importance on 1) Knowledge and credibility including possessing the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; 2) Delivery principally by encouraging student participation and increasing students' self-confidence; 3) Fairness as mainly characterized by teacher impartiality; 4) Rapport specifically through features that involved care and attention students; and 5) Organization and Preparation as manifested by prior preparation for every lesson and provision of supplemental material by teachers. The findings have important implications for student teachers and language teachers to improve the efficiency of their teaching practices.

Keywords: student teachers, perception, effective EFL teaching attributes, Libya

Öz

Bu araştırmada etkili dil öğretmenlerinin başarılı dil öğretimi ve öğrenme uygulamaları üzerindeki önemli etkisi üzerinedir. Bu çalışma, Lübnan üniversitelerinde aday öğretmen öğrencilerinin etkili dil öğretim algılarına dayanan niteliklerini ele almaktadır. Araştırmada hem nitel hem de nicel veri toplama araçlarını

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içeren çok yöntemli bir yaklaşım kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlara göre, Libyalı aday öğretmen öğrencilerinin şu maddelere önem verdikleri anlaşılmıştı: 1) gramer ve kelime bilgisi da dahil olmak üzere bilgi ve güvenilirliğe büyük önem verdiğini; 2) temel olarak öğrenci katılımını teşvik ederek ve öğrencinin özgüvenini artırarak eğitilmesi; 3) öğretmenin tarafsızlığı ile büyük ölçüde karakterize edilen dürüstlük; 4) öğrencilerin özellikle dikkat konusunda uyumlu olmarını; ve 5) her ders için önceden hazırlık yapılması ve öğretmenlerin ek materyal hazırlaması. Bulguların, öğretmen adaylarının ve dil öğretmenlerinin öğretmenlik uygulamalarını geliştirmeleri için önemli etkileri olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *öğretmen adayları, algı, etkili dil öğretim özellikler, libya*

Introduction

The history of teaching English in Libya dates back to the British mandate on Libya in 1942 when following the World War II English was introduced as the second language in the country. During the following years English was gradually placed in the curriculum of private and public schools (1997). However, due to lack of Libyan English teachers several English centers were opened to train teachers. Today, most 5th–9th grades are taught by Libyan female EFL teachers graduated from either English Department or College of Education and the majority of the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades are taught by male English teachers from Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, and Palestine whose English is very poor and affected by their native dialects (Omar, 2014).

At the university level, also, it appears that English programs in Libya have not been able to prepare teachers with academic English literacy so they can act as effective language teachers in their profession (Hawana,1981).With globalization which demands an increasing need and access to English, on the one hand, and lack of teachers who can equip the learners with the knowledge of English, on the other, there is a need to investigate what knowledge, characteristics and features should EFL teachers possess to make the English Language Teaching practices effective. To achieve good outcomes, first, teachers should know how learners define effective teaching (Brown, 2009). Second, by understanding students' perceptions, "teachers in training and practitioners can understand how to approach and improve their practice (Barnes & Lock, 2013, p. 19) as well as how to deliver their instruction (Lightbown & Spada, 2008).

However, studying this topic from the student teachers' perspective is a rather new line of research specifically for Libyan students. Thus, this study addresses the Libyan student teachers' perception of effective language teachers in the context of an international university in Cyprus.

During the last decades, the question of effective language teaching has tuned into a critical issue in the field of TESOL. It is argued that the nature of language teaching differs from teaching other subject matters, especially because the subject and the means of instruction are the same (Borg, 2006) consequently, the features of 'good language teachers' (White 1989) as transmitters of the English language knowledge to the language learners has given momentum. In fact, investigating perceptions is important because according to Richardson (1996), attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions are mental constructs that "name, define, and describe the structure and content of mental states thought to drive a person's actions" (p. 102).The number of studies addressing students' perception of effective language teachers are not insufficient (Brosh, 1996; Brown, 2009; Chen, 2005; Desai, Damewood & Jones, 2001; Faranda & Clarke, 2004; Kember & Wong; Koutsoulis, 2003; Kourieos & Evripidou, 2013; Park & Lee, 2006). The findings of some of the major studies are briefed out in what follows.

Brosh (1996) identified the attributes of EFL teachers as perceived by high school teachers and students in Israel. The highest importance was given to items related to commanding the target language and teaching comprehensibly by both teachers and students. However, teachers gave more weight to particular items like motivating students and research orientation, whereas treating students fairly was mostly favored by the students. Koutsoulis (2003) identified 94 characteristics of effective teachers in Cyprus and classified into three categories, namely, human characteristics like teacher friendliness, communication characteristics such as teacher's ability to communicate with students, and teaching and production characteristics like making lessons exciting and motivating. Park and Lee's (2006) investigation of the characteristics of effective English teachers based on the perception of teachers and students in high school in Korea, although affected by two variables of gender and performance, on the whole determined teachers' pedagogical knowledge and their ability to stimulate students' motivation and constructing their self-confidence as the most significant attributes. The findings obtained from Kourieos and Evripidou's (2013) research as perceived by Cypriot students indicated that an effective EFL teacher is the one who takes into account the students' individual differences, language anxiety as well as the abilities and interests

of the learners and consequently designs a facilitative learning environment. Results of Salahshour and Hajizadeh's research (2013) indicated that Iranian students advocate, among the other things, teachers' enthusiasm, his sense of responsibility towards students, his friendly behavior, his attempt to instruct grammar explicitly, and his ability to communicate ideas effectively. Similarly, Barnes and Lock (2013) found that high importance was placed on rapport attributes such as friendliness, care, and patience as well as on delivery attributes including error correction and a participatory mode of instruction. Fairness, target language knowledge, and good preparation were also favored highly by the participants.

As can be seen in the above examples, although some attributes appear universal, there is no consensus among researchers as to what characteristics a good language teacher should have given the fact that teaching-learning situations vary greatly and also there are individual differences between the learners which makes one teaching behaviors effective in one setting than in other settings (Brosh, 1996). Despite this, in a rather recent study and by an extensive review of previous studies, Barnes and Lock (2010) identified attributes of efficient teachers and classified them into five major categories that had originally been proposed by Faranda and Clarke (2004). This taxonomy is used as a major framework for analyzing the data in this study. These attributes are summarized in Table 1and descriptions are given accordingly.

Attributes	Description
Rapport	friendliness, sociability, empathy, accessibility, receptiveness, attitude
Delivery	personal style, communication, pedagogy
Fairness	grading, impartiality, examination relevance, transparency, workload
Knowledge and Credibility	content knowledge, competence (skills), experience

Table 1

Organization and Preparation	syllabus quality, clarity, and adherence; lesson preparation

Description of Effective teachers' Attributes (Faranda & Clarke, 2004)

Rapport is mainly focused on the psycholinguistic aspect of language teaching; in other words, the type of teacher-learner relationship (Borg, 2006) or the communication style. Students prefer a teacher who "establishes a classroom environment that stimulates and supports students' innate motivation" (Borsh, 1996, p. 127) and possessing this feature contributes to "reducing fear (fear of making mistakes, fear of foreigners), making students feel valued, promoting learning, and making students feel understood" (Barnes & Lock, 2010, p. 143). In fact, Rapport is closely related to the personality of a teacher and contributes to his efficiency during the instructional process (Politzer & Weiss, 1971) (also see Chen, 2005; Desai et al., 2001).

Delivery which covers personal style, communication and pedagogy is manifested, among the other things, by error correction, teaching methods, provision of grammar instruction, asking questions and giving enough time to respond (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Faranda & Clarke, 2004; Horwitz, 1987; Pak & Lee, 2006). Teachers' enthusiasm about teaching is also a priority because it leads to attention and subsequently learning takes place (Borsh, 1996).

Fairness is an attribute mainly related to examination and assessment as well as the academic workload. The most striking point in this category is learners' expectation to be treated 'impartially'. Exam preparation, provision of clear grading guidelines and homework assignment are the other factors determining the fairness of a good teacher (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Desai et al., 2001; Faranda & Clarke, 2004).

Knowledge and Credibility briefly means being qualified as an ELT teacher (Darling-Hammond &Youngs, 2002). This qualification can contain, but not limited to, having a good knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and the subject matter (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Chen, 2005; Faranda& Clarke, 2004; Pak & Lee, 2006).

Organization and Preparation is one of the main features of a good teacher because clear classifications and arrangements of the items in order of priority can facilitate learning (Brosh, 1996; Kember& Wong, 2000; Pak & Lee, 2006).

The review of literature shows that investigations into the attributes of a good teacher has not yielded uniform results in different contexts. The participants of most of these studies have been language learners rather than students, and more importantly, this issue has been neglected in some contexts like Libya. The objective of this study is, thus, to identify the desirable attributes of an effective (or good) language teacher as perceived by Libyan student teachers.

Method

This was a mixed-method case study that used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to address the issue under investigation.

Participants:

Participants were 42 Libyan students (45.2% males and 54.8% females) majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT) studying in Northern Cyprus in 2015-2016 academic year. All the students were native speakers of Arabic language with 14.3% of them between 18-24, 40.5% between 25-30, and 35.7% between 31-36 years of age. At the time of the study, 83% of the students were doing their Master's whereas the rest of the sample (16.7%) were doing their Bachelor's. forty-seven percent of the participants were first year and fifty-three percent were second year students. The participants were selected through convenience sampling.

Instruments:

This study used Barnes and Lock's (2010) questionnaire on attributes of effective teachers and lecturers containing 42 items. The reason for using this questionnaire was its comprehensiveness as the attributes included in the questionnaire had been identified based on careful examination of the previous studies. This questionnaire is organized under the five categories proposed by Faranda and Clarke (2004), namely, Rapport (items 1-11), Delivery (12-28), Fairness (29-33), Knowledge and Credibility (34-36), and Organization and Preparation (37-42). The questionnaire also contains a demographic section.

A semi-structured interview was also designed focusing on attributes of effective teachers across the five categories.

Data collection:

The questionnaire was administered almost near the end of the semester to the population under study. The respondents answered the questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = no idea, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree.

After quantitative data collection via the questionnaire, three female student teachers voluntarily participated in the follow-up interview. Each interview lasted for about 15 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The interview data was used as a complementary means to enrich the discussion.

Data analysis:

Descriptive statistics was used in this study to analyze the quantitative data. In the first place, the overall Mean and Standard Deviation of each category of the questionnaire was calculated. In the second place, the Mean and Standard Deviation of items related to each category were analyzed. The qualitative data obtained from the interview were triangulated with the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire to support this analysis and enrich the discussion.

Results and discussion

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics results of the analysis across the five major category of attributes of effective teachers in a descending manner.

Table 2

Overall ranking of attribute categories

	Mean
Knowledge and Credibility	5.6
Delivery	5.6
Fairness	5.4
Rapport	5.1
Organization and Preparation	4.9

Knowledge and Credibility (M=5.6) and Delivery (M=5.6) categories were ranked the highest and the most important categories. Fairness (M=5.4) was selected as the third most important category before Rapport (M=5.1). Organization and Preparation was the lowest ranked category (M=4.9). The results represented here, to a high extent, concur with the findings obtained by previous studies. In both Park and Lee's (2006) and Barnes and Lock's (2013) studies Knowledge and Credibility and Delivery attributes were scored higher as features that, according to the participants of this study, contributed to a status of a good teacher. This ranking, in general, illustrates a preference to knowledge of the target language among Libyan student teachers. In what follows, the results of each category are analyzed in more detail with respect to individual items.

Rapport

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics results of the items included in Rapport category.

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviations for Rapport Items

Items	Mean	SD
1. are friendly	5.9	.95
2. develop good relationships with students	5.0	1.4
3. share personal experiences	5.5	1.0
4. care about students	6.3	.64
5. are patient	5.9	.93
6. listen to students	6.1	.94
7. have a positive attitude in general	5.8	1.0
8. have charisma	5.0	1.1
9. understand the student's English education background	6.0	.67
10. understand the different student levels	5.5	1.2
11. have a sense of humor	5.5	1.0

Attributes in Rapport category were all considered important by the respondents and the Mean of all the attributes scored over 5. The fact that attributes or items involving care (4, 7, 9, 5 & 6) including care about students (M=6.3), listening to students (m=6.1), having positive attitudes towards them, patience (M=5.9) and friendliness (M=5.9) scored higher suggesting that

students advocate teachers who try to alleviate their anxieties and promote their self-confidence (Barnes & Lock, 2010).The results are consistent with those found by Salahshour and Hajizadeh (2013). This idea was also supported by interviewee 1 who argued that:

> Language teacher has to be a friend of his/her students to ensure conveying the message clearly and effectively. because students are learning another language rather than theirs and they need to have a good relationship with their teachers so as to accept the knowledge they get from them.

Similarly, interviewee 2 asserted that:

> The good teacher of English is the one who is friendly and who has got an open mind in dealing with those who learn English as a foreign language.

The above quotes show that student teachers consider building a good rapport with learners as a prerequisite for successful language learning.

Also, student teachers highly expect their teachers to understand their English education background mainly because it informs teachers about areas for which students have not received sufficient instruction and may perform poorly (Barnes & Lock, 2010).

Delivery

Similar to Rapport, responses to all items in Delivery category had a mean score above 5 (Table 4).

Table 4

Mean and Standard Deviations for Delivery Items

Items	Mean	SD
12. are enthusiastic about EFL teaching	5.3	1.6
13. give clear explanations	6.1	.68
14. use good examples	5.8	1.0
15. use a variety of teaching methods	6.3	.58
16. use Arabic selectively	5.0	1.1
17. correct writing errors	5.7	.95

18. correct speaking errors	5.7	.87
19. teach grammar	5.7	1.0
20. use group work	5.0	1.5
21. encourage student participation in class	6.7	.55
22. encourage participation of students with low confidence	6.4	.59
23. talk slowly in English	5.6	1.1
24. use easy words	5.9	.79
25. ask questions frequently	5.6	.79
26. ask questions then wait for volunteers to answer	5.1	1.1
27. ask individual students to answer questions	4.2	1.6
28. give students plenty of time to answer questions	5.9	.84

Encouraging student participation (M=6.7) and those who have low self-confidence (M=6.4) (items 21 and 22), the two items that ranked the highest in this category, indicates that teachers are supportive of participation. Barnes and Lock's (2013) and Park and Lee's (2006) studies support these findings. The two next selected items, i.e., use a variety of teaching methods (M=6.3) and give clear explanations (M=6.1) (items 15 & 13, respectively) suggest that methodological preferences are important for students. Interviewee 2 confirms these strategies by stating that:

I also believe that English language teacher is the one who is talented enough in selecting his teaching styles and who is able to use different teaching methods rather than depending solely on the set syllabus.

The above quote signifies that adherence to a single old-fashioned teaching style is not sufficient for contemporary English classes and students expect to embrace more up-to-date and flexible teaching approaches that can target and satisfy the needs of language learners.

They also had a high preference towards item 24, i.e., use easy words (M=5.9) which facilitates their understanding. Of all items, only item 27, i.e., ask individual students to answer questions (M=4.2) had a mean lower than 5. This, in fact, sheds light on the use of questioning. Whereas Libyan student teachers advocated questioning by their teachers as it is evident in mean scores of item 25, i.e., ask questions frequently (M=5.6) and item 26, i.e., ask questions then wait

for volunteers to answer (M=5.1), they did not prefer to be asked individually as shown in item 27. This finding is in contradiction with the results found by Barnes and Lock (2013) which showed that Korean students were more positive about being questioned individually. This confirms the argument put forward by some researchers maintaining that characteristics of a good language teacher is context-specific and varies from one context to another. The last item concerning questioning, item 28, i.e., give students plenty of time to answer questions (M=5.9) reflects students' desire of being given sufficient response time.

Error correction is the last area of concern in this category and it is related to lesson content as shown in items 17, 18, and 19 with the same means (M=5.7). Libyan student teachers unlike the Korean students in Barnes and Lock's (study) favored grammar instruction but similar to them expect grammar and speaking correction. Iranian students in Salahshour and Hajizade's also advocated explicit correction of their errors by the teacher. Of course, a comment mentioned by interviewee 3 highlighted that not only the areas that require correction but also the form of feedback is what students give value to. She argued that:

> Giving effective feedback is also very crucial to be good at language teaching. Because the wrong way of correcting learners' mistakes might lead to real dilemmas.

This quote also maintains the fact that offering inappropriate forms of feedback may hinder learning and result in further problems.

Concerning item 12, being enthusiastic about EFL teaching, although highly ranked (M=5.3), was not the first priority like in some other studies (Salahshour & Najizadeh, 2013, 83.3%).

It is also worth mentioning that although Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is the common methodology and Arabic is the medium of teaching and learning English in Libya (Omar, 2014), item 16, use Libyan selectively (M=5.0) is ranked as moderately positive and this may signifies student teachers' inclination towards more communicative-based approaches. In the context of Iran, likewise, the use of English language all the time in class was scored the highest (66.6%) by the respondents (Salahshour & Hajizadeh, 2013).

Fairness

Mean scores for items in category of Fairness indicated more variation among the items (Table 4).

Table 5

Mean and Standard Deviations for Fairness Items

Items	Mean	SD
29. treat all students fairly	6.7	.61
30. prepare students well for exams	4.9	1.2
31. give students clear grading guidelines	5.1	1.0
32. require students to work hard during class	4.4	1.8
33. require students to do homework	5.9	.51

Teacher impartiality as explained in item 29 was the most highly valued attribute by the respondents with the Mean of 6.7. Firstly, this feature is particularly significant in contexts where the class population is heterogeneous and students do not share the same level of language proficiency (Barnes & Lock, 2013). Secondly, the respondents also agreed that teachers should assign them homework (item 33) (M=5.9). Give students clear grading guidelines (item 31) (M=5.1) and prepare students well for exams (item 30) (M=4.9) were also preferred though to a lesser degree. However, surprisingly, the student teachers did not prefer to be required to work hard during class (item 32) (M=4.4). Barnes and Lock (2013) also found that compared to the other items in this category which had quite high mean scores, students moderately approved hard work during class. This preference may be traced in the teaching preference of students for grammar (item 19) in Delivery category that is representative of advocating more traditional approaches to teaching that are mostly based on GTM as it is still popular in Libya (Omar, 2014) and puts much demand on students through translation, memorization, and repetition, that is why they do not favor to work hard during the class time.

Knowledge and credibility

As shown in Table 6, all three attributes in Knowledge and Credibility category were scored high.

Table 6

Mean and Standard Deviations for Knowledge and Credibility Items

Items	Mean	SD

Items	Mean	SD
34. are well qualified for EFL teaching	5.5	1.3
35. have a good knowledge of grammar	6.0	.64
36. have a good knowledge of vocabulary	5.4	1.3

Although all the items had high mean scores, item 35, i.e., have a good knowledge of grammar (M=6.0) ranked the highest and this is in line with student teachers' leaning towards grammar teaching (item 19) in Delivery category. It is clear that in contexts like Libya where GTM is the common teaching methodology, possessing a good knowledge of the structure of the English language is considered as a necessary attribute of a good English teacher.

The respondents also preferred their language teachers to be qualified enough and have a thorough knowledge of vocabulary. The same results were found by Salahshour and Hajizade (2013) and the majority of students in their study marked accuracy of vocabulary, structure and pronunciation as very important. In addition to possessing the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, the interviewees mentioned some other qualities and qualification like having "good and clear pronunciation" (interviewee 1) and "writing" and "knowledge of subject matter" (interviewee 2) (see Darling-Hammond &Youngs, 2002). However, interviewee 3 defined a good language teacher as someone that does not only possess the types of knowledge mentioned above but as someone that "needs to be exposed to the foreign culture to be knowledgeable in how to teach that language effectively". This clearly indicates that the student teachers believe that ELT in contemporary area is not limited to the knowledge of the language itself; rather, a good understanding of socio-cultural aspects of language learning is also required to make it more usable for communication purposes.

Organization and preparation

According to Table 7, students generally supported the items in this group, though to a lesser degree compared to items in the other categories; that is why, this category was the least-ranked category of all.

Table 7

Mean and Standard Deviations for Organization and Preparation Items

Items	Mean	SD

37. are well prepared for every lesson	5.7	.85
38. provide a syllabus detailing weekly course content	4.6	1.5
39. explain the instructional methods to the class	5.1	1.2
40. tell students the lesson objectives each lesson	4.3	1.7
41. stick to the syllabus	4.4	1.4
42. make their own supplemental material	5.6	.68

Although the mean score of items 37 and 42, that is, preparation for every lesson (M=5.7) and preparing supplemental material (M=5.6) were high and showed that the student teachers greatly favor well-prepared teachers and expect them to go beyond the textbooks and prepare supplementary materials, they moderately approved syllabus- and objective-based items (38 and 40) suggesting that students do not appreciate a detailed syllabus and information about teaching methodology and objectives. This finding was inconsistent with the findings found by Barnes and Lock (2013). However, similar to their study, adherence to the syllabus (item 41) (Mean=4.4) that according to Kember and Wong (2000) typically passive learners favor this, was not considered important by the student teachers in this study. This view was supported by interviewee 1 maintaining that:

> Some teachers prefer to stick to the syllabus and to the text book materials ignoring the learners needs which is making the teacher not effective.

One reason underpinning this need is that Libyan schools' lack of facilities impedes English language teaching and learning, hence, making students to be in quest of facilities that might help them learn a second language more easily (Omar, 2014).

Conclusion

The desirable features of the effective language teacher as emerged from the present study were 1) Knowledge and credibility including overall qualification as well as possessing grammar and vocabulary knowledge;2) Delivery as indicated majorly by encouraging student participation and attempt to promote their self-confidence; 3) Fairness as principally characterized by teacher impartiality; 4) Rapport mainly through attributes that involve care about students; and 5)

Organization and Preparation as manifested in preparation for every lesson and preparing supplemental material. This shows that Libyan student teachers are, in general, supportive of commonly accepted standards of effective teaching (Banes & Lock, 2013). This includes, but not limited to, setting up a pleasant, participatory classroom atmospheres that is fair and impartial to all the students involved with their varying levels of language proficiency, and is taught through different teaching approaches, comprehensive syllabi and supplementary materials that facilitate learning.

The findings of this study would hopefully upgrade language teacher training programs for the benefit of both prospective teachers and students. The findings indicated that Libyan student teachers have certain needs and expectations from their teachers that had been neglected given the current traditional teaching practices that have been dominant through years or due to challenges of teaching English in Libya (Omar, 2014). However, student teachers` leaning towards attributes like care about students, and use a variety of teaching methods shows that the classes need to move toward more communicative, learner-centered approaches (Salahshour & Hajizadeh, 2013). Above all, students' preferences indicate how their instruction should be delivered (Lightbown & Spada, 2008),

It is also worth mentioning that sometimes there is a mismatch between what teachers perceive as effective attributes and what students do so, further research is recommended into the discrepancies between students' and teachers' belief systems in the L2 classroom Horwitz, (1988). Researchers are also suggested to explore student perceptions of effective EFL teachers in different settings to shed more light on preferences of students with different races, cultural backgrounds and attitudes. Investigations can also be carried out with respect to the underlying reasons why certain teacher attributes are preferred to others.

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