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## **Exploring Characteristics for Effective EFL Teachers From the Perceptions of Junior High School Students in Tainan**

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### *Abstract*

The purpose of this study was to investigate junior high school students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective English teachers. The focuses included: (1) junior high school students' general perceptions about English teacher characteristics, (2) whether gender has an effect on the perceptions, and (3) whether students with different academic achievement perceive differently in terms of characteristics for effective English teachers. This study was conducted via a questionnaire with 198 junior high school students in Tainan area. The data came from students' responses to a 50-item questionnaire, classifying into instructional competence, personality, and teacher-student relationship, and were analyzed with descriptive statistics, independent *t*-test and one-way ANOVA. The findings of the study indicated that students generally perceived teachers' personality and

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teacher-student relationship as more important characteristics than those of instructional competence. Being enthusiastic in teaching, friendly, open-minded, respecting students and caring about students were the most important characteristics of effective English teachers. Although mastering English was considered as an important characteristic, conducting lessons in English was not in favor. Moreover, female students considered the characteristics of personality and teacher-student relationship significantly more important than male students. Female students also rated significantly higher on characteristics such as motivating students to learn English and being familiar with the English culture whereas male students perceived respecting students and being ethical more important for effective English teachers. A significant variation was also found on the teacher-student relationship among students with high, middle and low academic achievement. Students with high academic achievement considered characteristics of teacher-student relationship more important than students with low academic achievement.

**Keyword : effective teachers, English teachers, teacher characteristics**

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## 優良英文教師特質研究—以台南市國中生為調查樣本

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### 摘要

本研究採用調查研究法探討國中學生對優良英文教師特質的看法。研究重點有三：一，整體而言，國中生所認定優良英文教師的特質有哪些。二，國中生的觀點是否有性別差異。三，學業成績高低是否影響國中生對優良英文教師特質的看法。本研究以問卷蒐集 189 位國中學生的意見，問卷內容共包含五十個教師特質，其中教學能力有二十一項，人格特質有十四項，師生關係有十五項。資料分析採用描述統計，獨立樣本 t 檢定及單因子變異數分析。獲致主要結果如下：

- ① 學生普遍認為英文教師的教師人格和師生關係兩類特質比教學能力還重要。最受學生歡迎的五大特質為熱心教學、友善、開朗、尊重學生和關心學生。然而，雖然學生普遍認為精通英語為優良英文教師需具備之特質，上課常使用英語教學卻不為學生所青睞。

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- ② 女生在本研究中比男生更重視教師人格和師生關係。男女生皆認為熱心教學為優良英文教師的重要特質，然而女學生對教師是否能提升學生英語學習動機及熟悉英文文化方面較男學生重視；男學生則較強調尊重學生及教師倫理等特質。
- ③ 成績高的學生也比成績低的學生重視師生關係。而能力分班的三年級學生中，前段班的學生對三大類教師特質的重視程度與後段班學生有顯著差異。

**關鍵詞：**優良教師、英語教師、教師特質

“Teachers are those who convey the truth, pass on the knowledge, and clarify the doubts,” said Confucius. Teachers who take on this belief, however, reported that just conveying knowledge does not make the teacher a good one (Richardson, 1997). Dewey (1933, 1938) described an effective teacher as not only a person who conveys knowledge to the students but also an artist whose practices defy notions of what is good or bad as well as what is right or wrong. As William Arthur Ward stated, “The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires” (as cited in ThinkExist, 2009, “William Arthur Ward Quotes,” para. 1). For the purpose of this study, *effective teachers* refer to teachers who are considered “good” or helpful for students’ learning.

The Ministry of Education (2000) in Taiwan described that decades ago, being an effective teacher was confined in expertise in knowledge, but at present time, an effective or “good” teacher is expected to hold many personal traits. Schaeffer, Epting, Zinn, and Buskit (2003) investigated students’ perceptions of the most important qualities for effective teaching and reported that being approachable, creative and interesting, encouraging and caring, enthusiastic, flexible and open-minded, knowledgeable, fair, respectful and holding realistic expectations are the eight of the top ten traits. Similar results were found in Okpala and Ellis (2005), where students indicated the key teacher quality components were caring for students and their learning, having professional knowledge, teaching skills and verbal skills, and dedication to teaching. While many researchers and educators supported that teachers can significantly influence student achievement (e.g., Aaronson, Barrow & Sander, 2007; Kane, Rockoff & Staiger, in press; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996),

not all teacher characteristics were agreed upon regarding effective teaching across disciplines.

Foreign language teachers were suggested to be different to teachers of other subjects (Borg, 2006). Borg reported that foreign language teachers are distinctive in the nature of the subject, in the teaching content and methodology, the interaction between the teacher and students, and the issue about being native or non-native. Teachers who teach English as a foreign language (EFL) in Taiwan are not only foreign teachers, native speakers, but also Taiwanese teachers, non-native speakers, who have taken certain amount of English language training. Native English teachers, though may be more fluent in English language, may not be seen as effective teachers from students' perspectives. On the other hand, Taiwanese teachers who acquire certain characteristics may be considered as effective English teachers, even if their English proficiency is not perfect. In this case, the characteristics of effective EFL teachers cannot be defined by the teachers' nationality or native language only.

Several studies have investigated characteristics of effective language teachers. Brosh (1996) reported that those who are considered as effective language teachers usually (a) teach comprehensibly, (b) master or command the language, (c) make lessons interesting, (d) help students with their independent study, and (e) do not discriminate among students. Penner (1992) indicated that effective language teaching lies in the growth and improvement of classroom communication, and effective language teachers should have adequately ability to communicate to students. Nevertheless, most of previous studies were conducted with postsecondary or college level students. High school students', especially junior high school students', perceptions of this particular issue seem to be neglected. Moreover, there is still relatively few studies specifically addressed the characteristics of

effective EFL teachers in Taiwan. More studies are needed so as to provide further suggestions and guidance for future as well as current EFL teachers.

This study intended to investigate the characteristics of effective EFL teachers from junior high school students' perspectives. As with the present day, most students are randomly assigned in all classes rather than grouped by their ability in Taiwan; therefore, heterogeneous classes are expected for most English teachers at junior high schools. Very few studies, however, have emphasized on how students with different academic achievement perceive the characteristics of effective teachers. Thus, this study also attempted to compare and contrast the perceptions between male and female students as well as the perceptions among students with high, middle and low academic achievement, and determine if gender or academic achievement has an effect on how students perceive their English teachers.

### **Research Questions**

The three research questions to be addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What are junior high school students' general perceptions of characteristics of effective English teachers?
2. What are the differences between male and female junior high school students' perceptions in terms of characteristics of effective English teachers?
3. What are the differences between the perceptions of low, middle, and high achievers in junior high school in terms of characteristics of effective English teachers?

## **Literature Review**

### **Characteristics of Effective Teachers**

Learning is not only a cognitive work but also an affective work. Volet (1997) indicated that individual differences in academic performance cannot be explained as solely the result of differences in general ability but appears as the product of complex and dynamic interactions between cognitive, affective and motivational variables. Teachers, as mediators of the classes, play an influential role on both cognitive and affective aspects of students' learning. Many researchers have conducted studies to investigate the characteristics of effective teachers. Characteristics reported in previous studies can be synthesized into three categories: instructional competence, personality and teacher-student relationship.

**Instructional competence.** In 2000, Pozo-Muñoz, Reboloso-Pacheco, and Fernández-Ramírez used the Semantic Differential Scale with 30 adjectives to investigate university students' perceptions of an ideal teacher. Results of the factor analysis suggested that teacher competency was the most important characteristic for an ideal teacher. Similarly, Witcher (2003) conducted a qualitative study with college students and reported that instructional competence, such as providing student-centered instruction, having adequate knowledge about the subject matter and being professional, were the most important characteristics for effective teachers.

**Personality.** Broadhead (1987) proposed a blue print for effective teachers and stated that personality is the essential characteristic for an effective teacher. Janene (1987) interviewed sixth grade students to find out students' perceptions of effective teachers. She reported that personality, such as being patient, sweet, and understanding, is what constituted as a "nice" teacher. Aksoy (1998) investigated elementary students' perceptions and reported that an effective teacher is kind, friendly, honest, tolerant, helpful, patient, and seldom shows nervousness and anger. More recently, Murphy (2004) described in a qualitative study with elementary school



students as well as pre-service and in-service teachers that being caring, patient, polite, and amiable, not being boring, shy or strict, are characteristics for effective teachers.

**Teacher-Student relationship.** Teacher's personality is highly associated with establishing teacher-student relationship. Davis (2001) emphasized on the relationship between students and teachers and claimed that this kind of social motivation can promote students' learning and achievement. Another Taiwanese researcher, Hou (2001), also reported that students' perceptions of the relationship with their teachers will affect teachers' classroom management and students' performance.

The participants in most previous studies, however, were mostly college students and elementary school students. Secondary schools, such as junior high school, students' perceptions were eliminated and demand more attention.

### **Characteristics of Effective Language Teacher**

Teachers of different subjects may need different characteristics specifically to the nature of the subject (Neumann, 2001). The results of Bell's (1996) survey study indicated that those teachers who are recognized as effective teachers often adopt communicative theories of foreign language teaching, assign small group work for negotiation of meaning, and instruct selected strategies for foreign language learning.

In fact, Brown (2000) also proposed that social factors may affect second language learning. Cooperation between students and teachers, such as asking question for clarification, providing feedbacks, requesting for teachers to paraphrase, explain and repeat, is very important for language learning. Socio-affective strategies, in this case, facilitate the

social-mediating activity and help with teacher-students interaction. For language teachers, there may be even more characteristics for effective teaching; nevertheless, not enough research has been discussing characteristics for effective English teachers, especially in Taiwan. This study intended to continue this line of research and provide further insights in students' perceptions of characteristics of effective English teachers.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The current study primarily involved a survey questionnaire concerning students' demographic information and their perceptions of English teacher characteristics. Because one purpose of this study was to identify and compare the perceptions from students with different academic achievement, students' grade report of English was used to classify students as high, middle or low achievers. Distribution of the questionnaire was conducted via group-administration process in one of the students' regular classes, and the second author of this study was present to collect the data as well as to respond to students' concerns and confusion.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 198 students (100 males; 98 females) at a prestigious junior high school in the suburban area in Tainan, Taiwan. There were 15 formal English teachers in this school. Among the 50 classes, 6 classes, 2 classes from each grade level, were randomly selected for this study. Because the third grade students were placed into high and low achievement classes based on their previous academic performance, one class of each level was selected. According to the administrator of education, all students (100%) at this school were able to attend a senior high school or

vocational high school after graduation, which was better than other junior high schools in the district. Similar to other junior high schools, English was one of students' major courses in the curriculum, and students were required to take five English classes per week, in which four classes were taught by formal teachers and one review class by student teachers (pre-service teachers).

### **Instrument**

The data of this study came from two major sources: (a) the Language Teacher Characteristics Questionnaire, and (b) students' grade report of their English mid-term exam in Fall 2007.

**Language teacher characteristics questionnaire.** The questionnaire of this study was adapted from Huang (2004)'s teacher characteristics questionnaire, and Brosh's (1996) language teacher characteristics questionnaire. In addition to the demographic information items, there were 50 items organized into three major categories emerged from the literature: first, instructional competence (21 items); second, personality (14 items); and third, teacher-student relationship (15 items). Participants were asked to report their perception about the characteristics of effective teachers on a 4-point Likert scale, by indicating the extent of importance of each teacher characteristic statement using 1 as *not important at all*, 2 as *not important*, 3 as *important* and 4 as *very important*. Items that received scores higher than 3 would represent that the characteristics were important regarding being an effective teacher.

Three experienced junior high school teachers had examined each item of the questionnaire. Their comments and suggestions in terms of the wording and statement of each characteristic description were considered for

modification of the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire of this study was .96 (Cronbach Alpha), indicating a high level of internal consistency.

**Mid-term grade report in English.** Due to the limitation of time and the difficulty in obtaining students' complete transcripts of the semester, students' achievement level was identified according to their mid-term grades in the English class. The midterm exam of the semester was accounted for a large percentage of students' academic achievement, thus making the midterm grade report as an acceptable measure for distinguishing students' academic achievement. However, this constraint may obstruct the interpretation and generalization of the result of this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The compiled data by the instrument was analyzed with SPSS 12.0 software to answer the three proposed research questions. Research question one investigated the students' overall perceptions of the characteristics of effective English teachers. A descriptive analysis was conducted to report the mean scores, standard deviation, and the percentage of importance. Students' preference was determined by the ranking of the mean scores of the 50 teacher characteristics. To answer the second research question, an independent *t* test was conducted to determine the gender difference. Research question three examined the effects of academic achievement on students' perceptions of characteristics of effective English teachers. Due to the different placement of the classes, the first and second grade students were identified as high (top 33%), middle and low (bottom 33%) achievers according to their grade report in English. The third grade students, who were assigned via ability grouping, were classified into only high and low achievers according to their class assignment. Students in the "A class" were

students who perform better in the previous junior high school years, so as to be classified as high achievers in this study; students in the “B class” generally received lower grades before the third year, so as to be classified as low achievers in this study. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the difference of perceptions among the three academic level groups.

## Results

### Characteristics of Effective English Teachers

The first research question investigated students’ general perceptions in terms of what were considered important to be an effective English teacher. As shown in Table 1, all three categories, instructional competence, personality, and teacher-student relationship received a mean score higher than 3, indicating that these aspects were all important to be an effective English teacher. However, personality and teacher-student relationship received slightly higher scores than instructional competence, suggesting that though instructional competence was an important factor, but personality and teacher-student relationship may be considered even more important.

Table 1

*Descriptive Analysis Results for the Three Categories (N = 198)*

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	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Instructional competence	3.06	0.27
Personality	3.33	0.17
Teacher-student relationship	3.31	0.08

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When each category was further examined in details, in the instructional competence section, the only item considered as important by 90% of the students was “Gives just enough home work.” However, in the personality category, more than 90% of the students consider the following characteristics were important to be an effective English teacher: being friendly, being open-minded, being earnest in teaching, being confident, being humorous, being ethical, being emotionally stable, being attentive to his/her appearance and dressing simply and modestly. In the teacher-student relationship category, the items were considered important by more than 90% of the students included: respecting students, caring about students, listening to and understanding students’ needs, asking questions and encouraging students to ask questions, being sensitive to students’ problems, praising students often, participating in students’ activities, showing expectations on students, and cautioning students in time.

According to ranking of students’ rating, the top five characteristics of effective English teachers were being enthusiastic in teaching, being friendly, being open-minded, respecting students and caring about students. The first three fell into the personality category while the next two were in the teacher-student relationship category. On the contrary, characteristics like often conducting the lesson in English, giving easy tests and being fashionable were in the bottom of the ranking list.

### **Gender Difference**

The second research question attempted to examine the gender difference on students’ perceptions of English teacher characteristics. Generally, female students rated higher than male students in all three categories. As shown in Table 2, the analysis by the independent *t* tests on the three categories between male and female students yield two significant

differences. Though no significant difference was found in the instructional competence, significant differences were found in personality ( $t = -3.13, p < .01$ ) and teacher-student relationship ( $t = -2.79, p < .01$ ). Female students perceived a teacher's personality and the relationship between the teacher and students more important for effective teaching than male students.

Table 2

*A Comparison of Male and Female Students' Perceptions (N = 198)*

	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Instructional competence	Male	100	2.99	.49	-1.93	.55
	Female	98	3.12	.41		
Personality	Male	100	3.25	.57	-3.13	.002**
	Female	98	3.44	.41		
Teacher-student relationship	Male	100	3.21	.52	-2.79	.006**
	Female	98	3.40	.39		

*Note.* \*\*  $P < .01$ ;  $N$  = number of students

Though no significant difference between male and female students in instructional competence category, when examined in detail, four items were found to reach the level of significance, including giving just enough homework ( $t = -2.42, p = .02$ ), providing practices and feedbacks ( $t = -2.47, p = .01$ ), motivating students to study English ( $t = -3.04, p < .01$ ), and being familiar with the English culture ( $t = -2.02, p = .04$ ). The ratings from female students were significant higher than male students in these items.

Similar difference was found in the ranking of the most important characteristics of effective teachers. For male students, the top three important characteristics were being enthusiastic in teaching ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ), respecting students ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ), and teaching interestingly and actively ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) whereas for female students, they were being open-minded ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ), being friendly ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ), and being enthusiastic in teaching ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ). The three top-rated items for female students were all characteristics about teachers' personality.

Interestingly, the characteristics that received lowest rating were alike. For the male students, the three lowest rating characteristics were giving tests often" ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 2.49$ ), emphasizing on academic achievement ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ), and often conducting the lesson in English ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 2.75$ ). The lowest two were the same for female students, but the female students also dislike English teachers who gives easy test ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ).

### **Perceptions Among Different Academic Achievers**

Because different methods were taken for the class assignment of the first two graders and the third graders in this school, the analysis of the third research question, "What are the differences between the perceptions of low, middle, and high achievers in junior high school in terms of characteristics of effective English teachers?" was conducted separately.

**First and second graders.** Generally speaking, for the first and second graders, high achievers rated slightly higher than middle achievers and low achievers in all three categories (instructional competence, personality, and teacher-student relationship). As shown in Table 3, one-way ANOVA analysis on the three categories of teacher characteristics among high,



middle and low achievers yielded only one significant variations at the .05 level of significance: teacher-student relationship ( $F(2, 117) = 3.59, P = .03 < .05$ ). No significant variation was found in either the instructional competence category or the personality category. Post hoc analyses using the Scheffe method found significant differences between high achievers and low achievers (mean difference = 0.28,  $p = .03 < .05$ ) in the teacher-student relationship category.

Table 3

*Comparison Among Three Achievement Level Students' Perceptions*

	<i>SS</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Post-Ho</i> <i>c</i>
Instructional competence						
Between	.93	2	.46			
Within	25.95	117	.22	2.09	.13	
Total	26.87	119				
Personality						
Between	1.33	2	.67			
Within	28.75	117	.25	2.71	.07	
Total	30.09	119				
Teacher-Student relationship						
Between	1.57	2	.79			
Within	25.59	117	.22	3.59	.03*	H>L
Total	27.17	119				

Note. \* $P < .05$ , H = High achievers, L = Low achievers

As shown in Table 4, the results from the top and bottom of the ranking of instructional competence characteristics between students of the three achievement levels also revealed interesting findings. High achievers emphasized teacher characteristics that associated with learning strategies, such as applying daily experiences and providing practical examples; middle achievers cared much on appropriate amount of homework with practices and feedbacks; and low achievers preferred characteristics that motivate learning, such as providing interesting and active instruction.

Table 4

*The Top/Bottom Ranking of Instructional Competence Characteristics Among Three Achievement Level Students*

	High	Middle	Low
Top			
1	Applies daily experience in learning	Gives practical examples	Teaches interestingly and actively
2	Gives practical examples	Gives just enough homework	Assigns only little or no homework
3	Maintains disciplines in class	Provides practices and feedbacks	Is knowledgeable
Bottom			
1	Emphasizes on academic achievement	Gives tests often	Gives test often
2	Gives easy tests	Emphasizes on academic achievement	Emphasizes on academic achievement

3	Assigns only little or no homework	Often conducts the lesson in English	Maintains disciplines in class
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Table 5 listed the results from the top and bottom of the ranking of personality characteristics between three academic level students. Characteristics such as being emotionally stable, enthusiastic in teaching, and open-minded were considered important for all three levels of achievers. Yet, high and middle achievers considered being energetic and athletic the least important as characteristics of effective teachers whereas low achievers considered this characteristic the most important.

Table 5  
*The Top/Bottom Ranking of Personality Characteristics Among Three Achievement Level Students*

	High	Middle	Low
Top			
1	Is emotionally stable	Is open-mind	Is energetic and athletic
2	Is enthusiastic in teaching	Is friendly	Is open-mind
3	Is ethical	Is enthusiastic in teaching	Is emotionally stable
Bottom			
1	Is fashionable	Is fashionable	Is fashionable
2	Dresses simply and modestly	Dresses simply and modestly	Dresses simply and modestly

3	Is energetic and athletic	Is energetic and athletic	Is humorous
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**Third graders.** The third grade students were in ability grouping classes. As a result, high achievers in the “A level classes” were expected to concentrate more on preparing the senior high school entrance examination and were under more academic pressure than those low achievers in the “B level classes.” This phenomenon may have influenced students’ perceptions of effective teacher characteristics. As presented in Table 6, independent *t* tests on the three categories between the high achievers and low achievers found significant differences on all three of them: instructional competence ( $t = 4.03, p < .01$ ), personality ( $t = 2.95, p < .01$ ), and teacher-student relationship ( $t = 2.66, p = .01 < .05$ ). Low achievers seemed to generally rate the importance of each teacher characteristic lower than high achievers. Nevertheless, among the three categories, personality and teacher-student relationship still received higher rating than instructional competence characteristics from the low achievers.

Table 6

*Comparison Between the Perceptions of 3rd Grade High and Low Achievers*

	Class	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Instructional Competence	High	3.25	.35	4.03	.000**
	Low	2.86	.44		
Personality	High	3.44	.38	2.95	.004**
	Low	3.09	.59		
Teacher-student Relationship	High	3.35	.36	2.66	.01*
	Low	3.09	.46		

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

## **Discussions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate junior high school students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective English teachers. Three major focuses of this study included students' general perceptions, the gender difference on students' perceptions, and whether students with different academic achievement perceived differently.

### **General Perceptions**

Students emphasized teachers' instructional competence to a certain level, but the result of this study indicated slightly higher importance on personality and teacher-student relationship. This result is consistent to several previous studies.

The top five characteristics of effective English teachers from students' responses are similar to Huang's (2004) findings. In both Huang's and this study, students revealed their expectations toward being respected and cared by their English teachers, and they mostly emphasized that an effective English teacher should be enthusiastic in teaching. Over years of teaching, some teachers may gradually lose their passion and enthusiasm, and students may be able to detect this subtle change. It is possible that whether a teacher is enthusiastic or not can affect the methods the teacher uses and their behaviors in their English classes, thus affecting students' learning. Moreover, the result of this study indicates that respecting students is important for effective English teachers, which is consistent with

Dudley-Marling (2006)'s suggestion that mutual respect is indispensable to be good teachers. Similar perspectives were pointed out by Borg (2006), who indicated that language teachers are required to have particular traits such as having sense of humor, being creative, flexible, "actor" type, motivating, enthusiastic, being able to communicate freely and radiating positive feelings. Borg also suggested that the relationship between the language teacher and students is important because there is more communication between teacher and students in language teaching. It seems that Huang's and Borg's studies as well as the results of this study, suggested that good relationship between teachers and students is an essential factor to be an effective English teacher.

On the other hand, characteristics as giving tests often and emphasizing on academic achievement received the lowest rating while the proceeding two characteristics not in favored by the students were conducting the lesson in English, and giving easy tests. The least desirable English teacher characteristic, giving tests often, was also reported in Huang (2004). It is understandable that no or only few students prefers to have tests in class nor do students feel comfortable with teachers who put most of the attention on academic achievement. Interestingly, students in this study did not favor teachers who give easy tests, either. One explanation may be that students may not obtain the sense of achievement through easy tests when most students are able to receive full marks. Another interesting finding was that students did not perceive effective English teachers should conduct the lesson in English (Rank 48), while still believing English teachers should master English (The mean score was higher than 3). This result seems to be contrasting to one of the teaching methods, "Direct method," which stresses on putting learners in a total English environment (Howatt, 1929) or the current trend of providing a whole English classroom environment. A

possible explanation is that most junior high school students have not yet acquired large vocabulary size; thus listening to English instruction can be too challenging. Another possibility may lie in the emphasis on the reading and writing skills in junior high schools, causing students to downgrade the importance of communicating in English.

### **Gender Difference**

The results of this study indicated that male and female students considered the importance of effective teacher characteristics differently in terms of personality and teacher-student relationship. In this study, female students perceived English teachers' personality and teacher-student relationship as more important characteristics than male students did. A possible explanation may be that, in classroom interactions, female students are generally more sensitive to or easier to be influenced by their teachers' personalities and emotions, and in turn, expect their teachers to be friendly, emotionally stable, humorous, considerate, open-minded and so on. These personality characteristics are often be considered as the basic characteristics that help develop good interpersonal relationship. Unlike female students, male students showed much care and concern about their dignity and face-saving, and believed that effective teachers should respect the students. This result is in accordance with Huang's (2004) finding that "respects students" was the top one characteristic for effective teachers in teacher-student relationship category.

Moreover, as Wang (2000) proposed that teachers' values and beliefs can affect students' behaviors significantly, and Harden and Crosby (2000) also suggested that teachers should also be mentors. In this study, male students revealed that being ethic is important for effective English teachers,

and the result is consistent with Huang's (2004) study (Top one ranking in personality category). However, both studies showed that female students emphasized more on being fair and being open-minded for English teachers. It seems that male students believe that teachers represent authority and teachers are like leaders for students to follow, but female students prefer teachers to be mentors and friends. Moreover, female students in this study generally received higher scores than male students. Due to the lower grades, male students may be physically punished more often than female students. This may explain why female students emphasized the kind of teacher characteristics that will help them improve their performance (e.g., asking questions, encouraging students to ask questions, reviewing the lessons with students), whereas male students considered the characteristic such as emphasizing on academic achievement the least important.

Though no significance was found in the instructional competence category, several items that reached significant difference need further discussion. Female students preferred teachers who provide practices and feedbacks, who give just enough homework, who motivate students to study English and who are familiar with the English culture, more than male students. On the other hand, male students mostly preferred hands on experience and applying the lesson to daily experience. An explanation of this difference may be that hands-on learning and daily experience provide male students more concrete ideas about the content, while female students may care more about the classroom atmosphere, which leads to their emphasis on feedbacks, practices, motivation and even discussions about culture. Further, Brosh (1996) reported that items, including "motivates students to study language" and "being familiar to language culture," are important characteristics for effective language teachers. In this study, female students seem to agree with Brosh's results, but male students might



consider those characteristics not as important for English teachers. One possible explanation may interpret this result from the motivation orientation perspective (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Female students may tend to be more integrative oriented in terms of their motivation to learn English, whereas male students may be more instrumental oriented and consider English as a tool for life. Students' motivation orientations were not investigated in this study. Thus, this can be a possible area for future research.

### **Difference Among Achievers of Three Levels**

Although significant variance was only found in the teacher-student relationship category among three levels of achievers, the comparison of the ranking may yield some insights. In instructional competence category, while high achievers considered maintaining disciplines in class important, middle achievers seem to be more passive in learning and expect English teachers to provide more practices and feedbacks. As for low achievers, they preferred teachers who provide interesting and active instruction and give little homework. The findings may illustrate the different expectations to English teachers due to the different goals of the achievers. However, an interesting finding is that compared with the result of Huang's study, in which both high and low achievers preferred teachers who describe comprehensibly and are knowledgeable, but these attributes were not considered important in this study. According to Neumann (2001), teaching at different subjects might need different attributes. For example, "hard" disciplines, such as physics and engineering, emphasize cognitive goals and logics, for instance, learning facts, whereas "soft" subjects, such as language and education, focus more on memorization and effective thinking skills. It

might explain the difference from Huang's result because the only part for English course to describe comprehensibly is grammar and English teachers are not like Physics or History teachers who have many opportunities to show their abundant knowledge.

The relationship between teachers and students was considered more important for high achievers than low achievers. The possible explanation may be that high achievers view English teacher as a person who has abundant knowledge and they preferred to establish close relationship with them so as to motivate their learning. This finding may correspond with Harden and Crosby's (2000) idea that good teacher should be a study guide producer, as well as with Lee's (2001), suggesting that good teacher-student relationship is a key element in students' motivation and classroom management. However, the result of the study also showed that students in different academic achievement levels illustrate different expectations to the English teachers. Teachers may need to adjust their communication and interaction approach accordingly.

### **Conclusions and Future Research**

Despite other language focused characteristics, being enthusiastic in teaching is the most important characteristics for effective English teachers. Korthagen (2004) proposed six levels that included mission, identity, belief, competencies, behaviors and environment to be effective teachers. The awareness of mission to be an effective English teacher is the first step. As an old proverb stated, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." Therefore, an effective English teacher should try to maintain their love of their work and to be enthusiastic in teaching.

Moreover, as reported in this study, students with different background and academic achievement may perceive differently the characteristics of

effective English teachers, indicating students' different needs and expectations from their English teachers. Thus, when designing lessons or when providing instructions, effective English teachers should take students' gender as well as academic achievement into consideration.

Last but not the least, because personality and teacher-student relationship were much emphasized in terms of effective teaching and learning, English teachers should also develop a caring relationship with students and provide opportunities to interact and communicate with students. As Brosh's (1996) suggested that effective language teachers will pay attention to teacher-student interactions and teacher-student relationship because teaching and learning is a communication process.

This study was conducted via a self-report questionnaire at only one junior high school. The under-representation sample may limit the generalization and interpretation of the results. Future studies with larger size of participants and variety of survey methods are needed to confirm the findings before reaching the final conclusions.

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