Junior Middle School Students' Opinions on Quality English Teachers: a Study at the Middle School Attached to QNUN

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Abstract: This study was designed to examine the features of quality English teachers as considered by 199 students in the Middle School Attached to QNUN. The study aimed to investigate the perceptions of overall features of quality English teachers, and the variations of students' opinions according to their English language performance and gender. The overall features of quality English teachers were obtained through an open-ended questionnaire. 32 features of quality English teachers emerged as a result of the content analysis of 27 sets of the open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire as the main instrument for the data collection was generated, and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .95. The findings revealed that half of the emergent features of quality English teachers fell in the socio-affective aspect (15 items) followed by the meta-cognitive aspect (9 items) and the cognitive aspect (8 items) respectively. When the two variables were taken into consideration, significant differences in opinions of features of quality English teachers were found to be related to the students' gender but not the level of their English language performance.

1. Introduction

Quality teachers can produce quality students. Teachers who have high level academic qualifications can educate students to achieve a satisfactory academic performance in examinations. Effective teachers with high quality are efficient and effective. Studies prove that excellent teachers can make students learn persistantly and effectively. On the contrary, poor quality teachers are unable to help students in making achievement [1]. As teachers, we should bear in mind that students need and deserve best efforts and best educators. All young children should have the best possible start in life. To find out our students' expectations can be of great help to us as teachers so that we get to know our own places and therefore what we need in order to fulfill our students' expectations.

To explore what kind of teachers that students consider as effective English teachers in junior high school is of great necessity. This project aimed at:

(1) exploring the features of quality English teachers as considered by junior high school students, and

(2) comparing students' opinions of quality English teachers with reference to their English language performance and their gender.

Specifically, this study was designed to answer the following questions:

(1) What are the features of quality English teachers as considered by junior high school students?

(2) Do students' opinions of features of quality English teachers vary significantly according to their English language performance and their gender? If so, what are the main patterns of variation?

2. Literature Review

Different definitions of quality English teachers have been proposed by different researchers. A number of studies have been conducted to investigate factors that affect the characteristics of effective English teachers.

2.1 Defining Features of Quality English Teachers in General

Definitions of effective teachers have been given in a variety of studies. Alejandro et al. suggests that quality teachers are good at motivating students to learn, and they have an understandable attitude with their students' learning, meanwhile they can set up a strong affective-emotional relationship with their students and connect the learning with their lives[2]. Some studies emphasized quality teachers on aspects of lesson explanation and enhancing students' learning quality. Teachers with high quality must be strict with themselves and they must be knowledgeable not only in the field of their major but also in other relevant fields, moreover they must be skillful too. Secondly, Effective teachers must never stop learning during the years of their teaching career. Thirdly, professional development must be kept in mind all the time as an effective teacher.

2.2 Factors Affecting the Perceptions of Features of Quality English Teachers

The previous research works have shown that factors affecting the students' opinions on features of quality teachers vary from people to people. In terms of students' performance and gender, there are many studies as shown in the following.

Chen and Lin's study shows that students' opinions of featuress of quality teachers varied according to their three achievement levels[3]. High achievers emphasized learning strategies; middle achievers cared more about assignments and assessments; and the students with low achievement favored in learning with motivation.

As regarding research methodology, seldom has there been a study on opinions of features of quality junior high school English teachers, especially from the perspectives of participants' language performance and gender.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Sampling Method

The number of students participating in this study were 199, who study in the Middle School Attached to Qinannan Normal University for Nationalities (MSA-QNUN) including both male and female with different English language performance. To classify the levels of students' English language performance, the researcher considered the grades of their previous English courses and

the third technique was applied. Any students whose average score fell in the top third were classified as the high proficiency level students, and those in the middle third as moderate, and those in the bottom third as low.

In terms of the sampling method, in the first stage for the qualitative data, the convenience sampling method was employed. Then, in the second stage for the quantitative data, the snowball sampling method was used. That is, each participant was asked to identify the samples to respond to the questionnaire. The distribution of the subjects was shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of the Subjects

Gender		English language performance		
Male	Female	Low	Moderate	High
82	117	64	68	67
Total:199		Total:199		

3.2 Instrument

For the qualitative data in the first stage, the content analysis was employed. That is, students' opinions of features of quality English teachers were first translated from Chinese into English. Then their perceptions were coded and interpreted into 32 items, which were further developed to a questionnaire for the quantitative data in the second stage.

To increase the validity of the translation, two translators were required to translate the scripts of students' perceptions from Chinese into English, and they discussed with authors from time to time to validate the translation. In the coding process, the inter-rater coding strategy was employed to ensure the validity of the coding results.

After the content analysis, a 5-point rating scale questionnaire with 32 items was generated to collect quantitative data. Each item ranged from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (not sure), 4 (agree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha was used to check the internal consistency of it. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of .95 indicates that the reliability of this questionnaire is high when compared with the acceptable reliability coefficients of .70.

3.3 Data Analysis

To answer the first research question about the features of quality English teachers, the content analysis was employed. To answer the second research question concerning students' opinions of features of quality English teachers with reference to their English language performance and their gender, the Chi-square tests were used.

In addition, O' Malley's classification was employed to further classify these 32 items into 3 categories, including cognitive aspect (COG), metacognitive aspect (MET) and socio-affective aspect (SOA) [4]. According to O' Malley, the cognitive aspects are related to the academic or brain aspects, the metacognitive is an expression to indicate an executive function, and the socio-affective aspect have close relationship with social-mediating activity and interacting with others. To have a clearer picture of students' opinions of features of quality English teachers among these 32 items, the descriptive statistics of percentages were employed.

4. Results

The results are presented according to the research questions. With regard to the research question 1: "What are the features of quality English teachers as considered by junior high school students?" after coding and interpreting students' opinions of the features of quality teachers, 32

items were generated.

Descriptive statistics were employed to describe students' agreement of these features in terms of percentage based on O' Malley's classification. The results are as follows:

Table 2: Cognitive Aspect

No.	Cognitive aspect (COG)	Percentage
	A quality English teacher should…	
COG 1	be knowledgeable.	97.5%
COG 2	have clear pronunciation.	97.0%
COG 3	transfer knowledge skillfully.	96.0%
COG 4	focus on both speaking and listening in real life communication.	96.0%
COG 5	focus on learning processes rather than outcomes.	92.0%
COG 6	Have a variety of teaching techniques.	89.9%
COG 7	provide extra-learning activities.	87.9%
COG 8	promote learner autonomy.	85.9%

As revealed in Table 2, in the cognitive aspect, students of the Middle School Attached to QNUN agreed that a quality English teacher should be knowledgeable and have a clear pronunciation with the higher percentage of 97.5% and 97.0% respectively. They agreed that a quality English teacher should provide extra-learning activities, and promote learner autonomy with a lower percentage of 87.9% and 85.9% respectively. In terms of the metacognitive aspect (MET), the percentages of each items were seen from Table 3.

Table 3: Metacognitive Aspect

No.	Metacognitive aspect (MET)	Percentage
	A quality English teacher should…	
MET 1	be punctual.	97.0%
MET 2	be well-prepared.	96.5%
MET 3	be responsible.	96.0%
MET 4	give opportunities for students to respond in English.	94.0%
MET 5	improve their teaching consistently.	91.5%
MET 6	use different teaching media.	91.0%
MET 7	manage class time appropriately.	88.9%
MET 8	be tidy.	88.4%
MET 9	not be too lenient or too strict.	87.9%

As shown in Table 3, in the metacognitive aspect, students agreed that A quality English teacher should be punctual, well-prepared, and responsible with a higher percentage of 97.0%, 96.5%, and 96.0% respectively. In contrast, less students agreed that an effective English teacher should be tidy and not be too lenient or too strict with lower percentages. With reference to the socio-affective aspect, the percentages of each items were seen from Table 4.

In the socio-affective aspect, Table 4 demonstrates that students agreed a quality English teacher should be a good role model, control his/her emotion well, and cheerful with higher percentages. While, less students agreed that an effective English teacher should provide advice on various issues and have effective manners with a lower percentage of 89.4%. In addition, students agreed least that an effective English teacher should be able to remember students by names or faces with the lowest percentage of 68.8%.

Table 4: Socio-Affective Aspect

No.	Socio-affective aspect (SOA)	Percentage
	A quality English teacher should …	
SOA 1	be a good role model.	97.0%
SOA 2	control his/her emotion well.	97.0%
SOA 3	be cheerful.	96.0%
SOA 4	care about all students.	95.5%
SOA 5	fair to every students.	95.0%
SOA 6	have an effective relationship with students.	94.0%
SOA 7	be patient.	93.5%
SOA 8	have enthusiasm in teaching.	93.5%
SOA 9	inspire students to learn.	93.0%
SOA 10	be open-minded.	92.5%
SOA 11	make students happy in learning.	92.5%
SOA 12	be understanding.	91.5%
SOA 13	provide advice on various issues.	89.4%
SOA 14	have good manners.	89.4%
SOA 15	be able to remember students by names or faces.	68.8%

With regard to research question 2: "Do students' opinions of features of quality English teachers vary significantly according to their English language performance and their gender? If they do, what are the main patterns of variation?" the Chi-square tests were used to examine the significant variation patterns. The items are presented in order of the percentage of students reporting agreement (4 or 5 in the questionnaire), ranking from highest to lowest.

Table 5 demonstrates significant variations in opinions of features of quality English teachers in terms of students' English language performance. The results of the Chi-square tests reveal one pattern according to this variable: "Moderate > High > Low".

Table 5: Significant Variation According to students' English Language Performance

Agreed more by Moderate students 2 socio-affective items	% of agreement (4 or 5)			Observed x^2
A quaitliy English teacher should…	Low	Moderate	High	P< .05
SOA 14 have good manners.	82.8%	97.1%	88.1%	x^2 = 11.76; P=.02
SOA 12 be understanding.	82.8%	95.6%	95.5%	x^2 =11.42 ; P= .02

This pattern indicates that a significantly greater percentage of the moderate-level students than the high-level and low-level students, reported agreement of 2 socio-affective items. Moderate-level students agreed that an effective English teacher should have good manners and be understanding with higher percentages of 97.1% and 95.6% respectively, while the low-level students agreed so with the same percentage of 82.8% for each item. With reference to the gender differences, the significant variation pattern is seen from Table 6.

Table 6 demonstrates significant variations in opinions of features of quality English teachers in terms of students' gender. The results of the Chi-square tests reveal one variation pattern according to this variable: "Female > Male".

This pattern indicates that a significantly greater percentage of female students than the male students, reported agreement of 6 items, which are 1 cognitive, 3 metacognitive, and 2 socio-affective aspects. One hundred and nearly one hundred percent of female students agreed that an effective English language teacher should be knowledgeable and cheerful. Female students agreed that an effective English language teacher should manage class time appropriately (93.2%),

not be too lenient or too strict (93.2%), and use different teaching media (93.2%), while male students agreed so with 82.9 percent, 80.5 percent, and 87.8 percent respectively.

Table 6: Significant Variation According to students' Gender

Agreed more by Female students	% of agreement (4 or 5)		Observed x^2
1 cognitive, 3 metacognitive, and 2 socio-affective items	Male	Female	P<.05
A quality English language teacher should…			
COG 1 be knowledgeable.	93.9%	100%	$x^2 = 7.32; P=.03$
SOA 3 be cheerful.	91.5%	99.1%	$x^2 = 7.45; P=.02$
SOA 14 have good manners.	81.7%	94.9%	$x^2 = 9.60; P=.01$
MET 7 manage class time appropriately.	82.9%	93.2%	$x^2 = 9.64; P=.01$
MET 9 not be too lenient or too strict.	80.5%	93.2%	$x^2 = 7.77; P=.02$
MET 6 use different teaching media.	87.8%	93.2%	$x^2 = 5.88; P=.05$

5. Discussions

In this section, the discussion of the research findings including possible reasons as an explanation for apparent significant variations that affect the features of quality English teachers are presented.

5.1 Defining Quality English Teachers

The definition of quality English teachers is perceived differently by different researchers. Based on the study conducted by Vialle and Quigley, a sense of humor, creativity and curiosity were qualities that were highly valued by the students[5]. In the present study, the findings of this project reveal that effective English teachers should be knowledgeable about the subject, enthusiastic and skillful about teaching and understanding students. This result is consistent with the research conducted by Wei and Sun who claims that both the knowledge and skills of teaching the subject are important to be an effective teacher[6].

5.2 The Main Patterns of Variation in Terms of students' English Language Performance and Their Gender

The features of quality teachers are related to students' achievements, gender, ethnicity, age, year of study, and area of specialization. An effective teacher of English should pay attention to socio-affective strategies while teaching. The findings of the present study show that most of characteristics of effective English teachers fell in socio-affective aspect (15 items) followed by meta-cognitive aspect (9 items) and cognitive aspect (8 items).

Among the three categories as mentioned above, most of students were found to place high value on the faetures that quality English teachers should be knowledgeable, cheerful, punctual, control his or her emotion well and set a role model. This is probably because students hope that they expect to learn whatever knowledge that might be beneficial to them from their teachers. Quality teachers should be knowledgeable about the teaching materials they are teaching and they should also know well about the curriculum and the program.

The findings also reveal that three groups with different English proficiency levels chose two items of socio-affective aspects differently at a slight significance level. The low level proficiency group place the least importance on teachers' manners and they don't care much about whether the teachers are understanding. What they care is probably to be able to understand what the teachers teach. High achievement students reported different characteristics from the low achievement

students in pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills.

As for the genders, the present study reveals the opinions of quality English teachers showed significant difference. Female students show higher learning motivation and have a good attitude in language learning. They are more interested in the language they are learning and the culture of the language. They are satisfied with the reaction to the surroundings.

6. Conclusion

This study focused on junior middle school students' opinions of features of quality English teachers. After the content analysis of students' perceptions, a 5-point rating scale questionnaire was generated for data collection. Findings in this study revealed that the most agreed features of quality English teachers are the features related to socio-affective aspect, followed by cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects. What's more, perceptions of effective English teachers showed slight difference according to students' English language performance, and significant differences were shown in terms of students' gender. The findings indicate that students' opinions not only concern about the academic aspect, but also social aspect. That is, a harmonious social relationship between teachers and students is also important, which can also reduce students' learning anxiety in class, especially in reading classes.

Some aspects need taking into consideration in the future research. First, research on students from different schools could be explored in the future, which will probably provide different findings. Second, other variables like participants' years of English learning, ethnicity groups and motivation are factors worth investigating. With regard to the instrument, not only questionnaire, but also interview or class-room observation may provide more detailed information from different perspectives. Finally, comparison students' opinions with teachers' opinions of the features of a quality teacher will make both teachers and learners know their needs from the other side, and thus a more comprehensive picture will be obtained. Both students and teachers then know how to adjust themselves to suit others in teaching and learning.

Acknowledgement

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