

# *A Comprehensive Analysis on Core Competencies of a Good English Teacher*

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**Abstract:** This article explores the essential qualities that constitute a proficient English teacher in the context of China's educational landscape. Drawing inspiration from historical figures like Confucius and Socrates, as well as established professional standards outlined by NBPTS, the paper outlines five core competencies: Bilingual culture quality and cross-cultural awareness, competence of lifelong learning, competence of reflection, competence of empathy, and competence to use modern technology. These competencies address the unique demands of English language teaching in China, considering factors such as cultural diversity, evolving educational technologies, and the need for lifelong learning. By emphasizing these core competencies, the article aims to guide English educators towards effective self-development, enhance students' language proficiency, and contribute positively to China's international development efforts.

## **1. Introduction**

The most initial example of a good teacher comes from the Analects, by which an inspiring, amiable, wise and caring and knowledgeable teacher--Confucius, is presented. Coincidentally, Socrates, as presented in Plato's Dialogues, has almost the same qualities as Confucius as a teacher. There is no doubt that Confucius and Socrates are the primary perceptions of good teachers both in China and in the West.

As a pioneer in developing professional standards for teachers, The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) of America pointed out five core propositions for an accomplished teacher: 1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning. 2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students. 3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning. 4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience. 5. Teachers are members of learning communities.[1] A review of the relevant literature reveals the definition of a good teacher is generally the same around the world. However, in the context of internationalization, national educational reform, cultural heritage, and intertwined modernization practices, there are different preferences for the definition of a good teacher in different disciplines.

In this paper, the competencies that English teachers need to have in China today are discussed.

## 2. Core competencies of a good English teacher in China

Parrott[2] listed 30 good qualities of good language teachers, which can be divided into three categories: high moral dedication, good professional qualities and distinct personal style. Brosh [3] emphasize a good language teacher should command the target language, possess good ability in teaching and be fair and available to students. There is a worldwide consensus on what a good teacher is and what it means to be a good teacher. Since the teaching environment and students vary from country to country, the competencies required of teachers vary as well. In addition to the professional abilities and ethical qualities commonly referred to, what are some of the other core competencies that a good English teacher needs to have in China?

### 2.1 Bilingual culture quality and cross-cultural awareness

In recent years a great deal has been discussed about the vital role of culture for L2 learner. Brosh [3] suggested that perceiving cultural knowledge of the target language is relevant and important for effective language teaching. American linguist Lado [4] said that educators cannot teach a language without understanding the cultural context of the target language. The learning of a language is the learning of a culture, language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the life of language. The cultural background, history, and values of English-speaking countries deeply influence English expressions and language habits. As foreign language learning progresses, cultural factors will replace phonology, vocabulary and grammar as the key factors governing the development of learners' language skills. Language teachers with good bilingual cultural qualities are a prerequisite for developing students with cross-cultural awareness. Only with an in-depth understanding of these cultural backgrounds can English teachers more accurately grasp the connotations and extensions of the language, and only with bilingual cultural qualities can English teachers better understand and teach the English language and thus teach English more effectively. Moreover, intercultural awareness can help English teachers guide students to avoid cultural misunderstanding and conflict. In cross-cultural communication, misunderstandings and conflicts can easily arise due to differences in cultural backgrounds. If teachers do not have intercultural awareness, it is difficult to help students solve these problems. Teachers with intercultural awareness can guide students to understand and treat different cultures correctly, avoid cultural misunderstandings and conflicts, and thus carry out intercultural communication better. Meanwhile, cross-cultural communication has become an inevitable trend in the context of globalisation. Teachers with intercultural awareness can guide students to understand different cultures, improve their intercultural competence and global vision, and prepare them for future intercultural communication and cooperation.

According to In World Languages Standards [1], “Accomplished teachers understand well of target cultures and understand how languages and cultures are intimately linked.” Take some examples, based on the language habits, Chinese usually say “What’s your name?” when asking someone’s name and “I want a coke” when order in MacDonalD, however, native English speaker take “May I have your name?” and “Could you please give me a coke?” as a polite way to express the same meaning. The other example, in some certain context, “No” has different meaning in China and in the US, when someone visits a Chinese home, the host asked if the guest would like some tea, if the guest says "No, thank you!", the host will still offer the guest a cup of tea, because sometimes when Chinese say “No”, it is not a really refusal, but to express they do not want to bother others. As the same scenario occurs in the US, the host will follow the guest's refusal. The difference is just because Chinese culture has many implications beyond words, while American culture is straightforward. If the teacher could have both Chinese culture and Western culture at his fingertips and know the deeper reasons behind them, he will better stimulate students to explore and study, and his students will definitely perceive the interesting differences and amazing similarities

between two cultures. Imagine if a teacher could not only discuss Shakespeare, but also talk about ancient Chinese poetry, not only familiar with NBA, but also like Chinese ping pong culture, not only agree with the development of western countries, but also proud of the improvement of China, he or she could definitely make students better understand the cultures carried by both the target language and native language, and obtain awareness of cultural equality.

Therefore, the bilingual cultural quality and intercultural awareness of English teachers are of great significance in improving teaching effectiveness and cultivating students' comprehensive quality. Only English teachers with bilingual cultural quality and intercultural awareness can teach English better, help students understand and use English better, avoid cultural misunderstandings and conflicts, improve their intercultural competence and global vision, and prepare them for future intercultural communication and cooperation.

## 2.2 Competence of life-long learning

Knowledge is a prerequisite for excellent teaching ability, the improvement of English proficiency is a process of continuous accumulation. To be the roles as controller/ assessor/ prompter/ organize/ participant/ resource [5], in the information era, it is especially important for teachers to constantly update ideology, master new information and educational technologies, renew knowledge, ability and quality structure. According to Brosh [3] that unlike other subjects, language is influenced by social, political, psychological, and practical values, so that those who want to be an outstanding English teacher, should not only learn the professional knowledge of English subjects, but also read extensively, strive to build a diversified knowledge structure, learn some general knowledge of natural science and social science, etc., and keep abreast of the latest knowledge of scientific developments and frontiers.

With the accelerated process of globalisation, English, as an international language, is constantly changing its vocabulary, grammar and expressions. New vocabulary, phrases and expressions are constantly emerging, such as "selfie" and "hashtag". English teachers need to remain sensitive to language changes and ensure that the content of their teaching is up-to-date by constantly learning new vocabulary, grammar and expressions. Furthermore, with the progress of education reform, English teaching concepts and methods are constantly being updated. Taking China as an example, unlike the traditional teaching concepts, the new education concepts emphasise the students' subjective position and require that attention be paid to the cultivation of students' practical application ability and intercultural communication ability; at the same time, students' needs for English learning are diversified, including academic needs, vocational needs and personal interests. This requires English teachers to constantly update their educational concepts and adapt to the new educational needs through continuous learning of new teaching methods and techniques. There is another point that cannot be overlooked, that lifelong learning is not only necessary for teachers' professional development, but also for their personal development. In order to maintain their professional status, English teachers need to continuously improve their professionalism and teaching ability, update their knowledge and skills, improve their professional competitiveness and lay a solid foundation for their future career development.

Teacher is the catalyst for students' growth and the best means for students to obtain knowledge and assistance, in China people always say that when you want to give students a glass of water, you should have a river with constant streams. Teachers who do not have a high enthusiasm for learning, but simply ask students to study well, such a request is pale and unconvincing. Thus, only when teachers keep learning can students' knowledge be updated, and only when teachers establish the idea of lifelong learning can they guide students to develop the habit of lifelong learning.

## 2.3 Competence of reflection

Socrates said a life without reflection was an unworthy life. According to World Languages Standards “reflection is the 8th standard for judging accomplished teachers, the accomplished teachers of world languages continually analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction in order to strengthen their teaching and enhance student learning” [1]. Reflection holds the value of life for everyone's growth. For teachers, teaching reflection is a dialogue with classroom practice, which permeates in the improvement of teachers' practical wisdom, not only promotes the improvement of teachers' ability to analyze problems, but also prompts the classroom to become a living and challenging place for learning, and provides unlimited development space for teachers to carry out action research. Therefore, reflection is a kind of awareness, ability, and habit, which has a positive effect on the overall improvement of teachers' quality and teaching ability.

Reflection can help teachers gain a deeper understanding of students' learning needs and problems, so that they can adjust their teaching methods and strategies to improve teaching effectiveness. Through reflection, teachers can think about how to better stimulate students' interest in learning and improve students' motivation and participation. At the same time, reflection can also help teachers find problems and deficiencies in teaching, make timely adjustments and improvements to ensure that the teaching effect is constantly improved. Secondly, reflection can help teachers constantly update their educational concepts and improve their teaching skills, thus promoting their own professional development. In the process of reflection, teachers can think about how to better utilize modern teaching methods and techniques to improve teaching effectiveness and efficiency. At the same time, reflection can also help teachers understand the latest educational concepts and teaching methods, constantly update their knowledge system and teaching skills, and improve their professionalism and competitiveness. Furthermore, reflection can stimulate teachers' innovative thinking, try new teaching methods and means, and improve teaching quality and efficiency. Through reflection, teachers can think about how to better combine the actual situation and needs of students, innovate teaching methods and approaches, and improve teaching effectiveness and quality. Further, reflection can also help teachers to identify problems and deficiencies in teaching, put forward improvement measures and suggestions, and provide useful references and lessons for future teaching. Through reflection, teachers can think about how to better solve the problems and difficulties encountered in teaching and put forward effective solutions and measures. At the same time, reflection can also help teachers to summarize lessons learned and provide useful reference and borrowing for future teaching work.

In a lecture, a National Model teacher with 30 years of teaching experience shared her teaching experience, she said she had a special habit of reviewing her teaching at the end of each month and recording it on papers, including the highlights and weaknesses of the teaching process, such as her own understanding of the material, innovative teaching methods, the parts of the teaching process with high student participation, students' creative responses, the content that students found boring, and the parts of the teaching process in which students did not interact actively, and so on. In addition to these wonderful points, she also records the shortcomings, such as a failed lesson or unpleasant conflicts between teachers and students in teaching; inappropriate evaluation of students; the organization of teaching activities is un conducive to students' independent inquiry; the formulation of problems and the creation of situations do not take into account students' existing knowledge and life experience, and do not follow students' cognitive laws, etc.

There is no success by chance, and any success carries a great deal of hard work and perseverance behind it. As a teacher, reflection is the wisdom that leads to self-growth and professional progress, and it plays an invaluable role in improving the level of teaching and professionalism, and it helps teachers to achieve their teaching goals by constantly adjusting their

teaching practices. A good teacher is not only a curriculum implementer, but also a reflective practitioner.

## 2.4 Competence of empathy

Teachers with empathetic ability give students the knowledge and psychological support and provide them with energy to explore the world of English. Empathy is a natural human attribute, is the willingness of teachers to put aside their personal standards of reference and try to see things from the students' point of view. Rogers [6] once said that caring teachers would be cognizant of the perspective of students and see the world through the eyes of students, which was more conducive to students' learning. He also emphasized his point of view that teachers should look at learning and life from students' perspective on their own initiative. In China, more and more English teaching classes are beginning to change from teacher-centered class to student-centered class. On the one hand, student-centered class can better cultivate students' initiative and improve their motivation to learn, On the other hand, the number of students with psychological problems is increasing and teachers are required to pay more attention on it. Teachers' competence in empathy makes this paradigm shift possible.

Empathy enables teachers to better understand students' needs and feelings, including the difficulties and challenges they may encounter in learning English. This understanding can help teachers abandon methods and approaches that do not conform to the laws of education, identify the problems that students have, choose behaviors that are conducive to fostering students' physical and mental development, and provide more personalized instruction to meet the needs of different students; second, empathy helps teachers to be able to see and care for students beyond their own perspectives and experiences, and to build a closer and more positive student-teacher relationship, so that students feel respected, cared for, understood, and even appreciated. When teachers are able to understand and care about students' feelings and needs, students are more likely to have trust in teachers and be more willing to work with them. Furthermore, empathy helps to promote effective communication. When teachers are able to place themselves in their students' shoes, they are more likely to understand their students' perspectives and ideas, and more effectively address the problems that students encounter during the learning process while providing a relaxed and safe environment for students to self-discover. Most but not least, when teachers are empathetic, they are more likely to be able to understand and help students overcome the difficulties and obstacles they may encounter in learning English, to understand students' needs and interests so that they can adjust their teaching content and methods, and to provide students with appropriate emotional support, eliminating their fears and insecurities, stopping their defensiveness and resistance, and making them more willing to express themselves and to develop their own communicative competence in English.

Therefore, a good English teacher needs to have a certain level of empathy.

## 2.5 Competence to use technology to assist teaching

According to World Language Standards, teachers stay abreast of relevant technological advancements and are familiar with how technology not only assists instructional planning and delivery of instruction, but also offers ways to examine the effectiveness of lessons.[1]

Before the year of 2020, China's educational resources were relatively closed and there was no awareness of sharing teaching resources, the network technology and school equipment were well established at the time, however, most teachers still taught mainly with chalk and would rarely share online teaching resources with students. Due to the COVID-19, online education has had a very remarkable development and the whole society has established a relatively complete online

teaching system, both in terms of equipment and teaching resources in the past three years. With the popularity of Internet technology in modern education, new media teaching technology has also widely penetrated into English classrooms, and become a necessary tool for the efficient completion of English teaching gradually. Compared with the traditional college English teaching mode, new media English teaching has largely opened up the path of English teaching and added a certain degree of interest to the transmission of English knowledge. The complex and obscure English content is presented in an intuitive and clear way through videos, cartoons, pictures and animations, which facilitates English teaching in an immersive environment and allows students to grasp the relevant English knowledge more deeply. In the current blended teaching of English in college, teachers can use new media teaching technology to create a specific English learning atmosphere, but also to attract students' attention and stimulate their thirst for English knowledge with a novel teaching mode. At the same time, through modern technology, teachers can better track and understand the learning progress and needs of each student, so as to provide personalized teaching plans for each student and meet the needs of different students. It is also very important that modern technology can enable more students to enjoy quality educational resources without geographical and economic constraints, which in a way promotes educational equity. For example, distance education and online courses can enable students in remote areas to have access to high-quality education as well. Because teacher's ability to use modern technology as an assistance in the classroom became more and more important, traditional teachers with older age are under some pressure due to the incompetence to use modern technology.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper gives the answer to the question what constitutes a good teacher of English language? In the context of English education in China, a good English teacher is preferred to have five core competencies: Bilingual culture quality and cross-cultural awareness, competence of lifelong learning, competence of empathy, competence of reflection and competence to use modern technology. These five core competencies will assist Chinese English teachers to achieve self-development, promote students' English language abilities and exert a positive and proactive influence in China's international development.

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