

The Jewels in English Language Teaching: Attributes of Quality English Language Teachers in Second Language Setting

Norazrina Ag-Ahmad¹, Ahmad Thamrini Fadzlin Syed Mohamed^{2*} and Erda Wati Bakar²

¹Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Sabah Branch, Kota Kinabalu Campus, 88997 Sabah, Malaysia

²Language Centre, National Defence University of Malaysia, 57000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The growing demand for high-quality English language teachers who can effectively facilitate language learning has prompted the need for research in this area. By utilising a phenomenological approach and in-depth interviews, this study explores the lived experiences of ten experienced English language teachers from the Eastern part of Malaysia and five stakeholders in the English language teaching (ELT) field. The aim is to gain insights into their perceptions of what constitutes a quality English language teacher. The findings highlight that passion for teaching, cognitive abilities, social-emotional competencies, personality traits and a concept of ‘going beyond teaching’ are crucial for quality teachers. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of essential attributes that define a quality English language teacher, enabling teacher training institutions to refocus their curriculum and incorporate courses that prepare teachers holistically and enhance second language teaching and learning, particularly in the social-emotional domain. Several recommendations for including specific components in teacher training programs are also discussed.

Keywords: English language teaching (ELT), phenomenological approach, social-emotional domain, teacher training, quality English language teacher

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E-mail addresses:

norazrinaagahmad1984@gmail.com (Norazrina Ag-Ahmad)

thamrini@upnm.edu.my (Ahmad Thamrini Fadzlin Syed Mohamed)

erdawati@upnm.edu.my (Erda Wati Bakar)

*Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for quality education highlight the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable education and creating more opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone (UNESCO, 2015). As a developing country, Malaysia strives

to improve its educational standards and prepare its younger generation for the challenging job market demands. One key area of focus is improving students' mastery of the English language at the primary and secondary levels, which is vital for the nation's future workforce. Much research has shown how mastery of the language can result in employment (Adebola et al., 2020; Ahmmed et al., 2020; Hiew et al., 2021; Hsieh, 2021; Jing & Wang, 2022; Singh et al., 2021; Solati et al., 2022; Ting et al., 2017), positive and negative working ability (Mohamed et al., 2020; Romadlon & Arifin, 2021) and improving social mobility (Choi, 2021; Di Paolo & Tansel, 2019; McKee & Paasche-Orlow, 2012; Miranda & Zhu, 2021). The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE) is determined to train quality English language teachers who can provide an effective learning environment to achieve this goal (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Kepol, 2017; Mohamed, 2015; Omar et al., 2019) which is also in line with UNESCO (2015) SDG aspirations.

In 2013, the MoE established the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC) 2013 to address the declining English standards by putting more emphasis on developing quality teachers and enhancing Malaysia's global economic reputation (MoE, 2013). Aside from raising the entry bar for teachers to be amongst the top 30% of graduates, the government also strives to upgrade the quality of teachers through school-based training, continuous professional development courses and peer-led culture of excellence. To produce quality

classroom teachers, the MoE attempts to provide courses and training concentrated on new areas based on grade promotion and enhancing English proficiency among teachers. However, challenges in terms of teacher participation, technical facilities, logistics, and time constraints (Aziz & Uri, 2017; Gill, 2013; MoE, 2013; Omar et al., 2019; Sukri & Yunus, 2020) hinder the results of such efforts.

A study by the Malaysian Ministry of Education found that 63% of schools rated themselves as practising good English language teaching compared to just 13% by the school inspectors (MoE, 2013), thus suggesting a disparity of opinions among English as a second language (ESL) teachers and stakeholders' view on teacher's quality and good teaching practices. Furthermore, Kepol (2017) found that the current policies fell short of fully capturing a quality teacher's multifaceted nature and characteristics. According to Goh (2012), there seems to be a significant disparity between quality standards for what a teacher 'can do' and what they 'could do' in the classroom. As a result, the assessment of teacher standards would not accurately reflect the realities of teaching in the classroom because teachers would not have the opportunity to articulate their actions and pedagogical choices.

This study explores experienced ESL teachers' and stakeholders' conceptions of what it means to be a quality English language teacher and how this understanding can influence future teacher training. Although this study is limited

to Malaysia, the findings have broader implications for improving English language teaching worldwide. Understanding a quality teacher's transformation process and attributes can help overcome the 'stuffed' curriculum and create a 'less is more' approach (Cousin, 2006) for teacher education, which is the 'jewels' of teacher training. This knowledge can be beneficial in improving teacher training and continuously improving English language teaching and learning in countries with similar second language (L2) settings. This study intends to answer the following research question:

1. How do experienced ESL teachers and stakeholders view quality English language teachers in an L2 setting?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective English Language Teaching

English language teaching (ELT) is a worldwide crucial component of language education. Over the years, language teaching has evolved from focusing on grammar rules and memorisation to a more communicative and student-centred approach. Research on effective English language teaching has gained significant attention recently, with an increasing number of studies focusing on teaching ESL or foreign language (EFL) to improve students' language proficiency and communication skills.

Several factors are necessary to effectively teach English, such as having strong teaching principles, access to adequate resources, and good English proficiency. The role of the teacher in

successful English language teaching cannot be overstated, as they are responsible for creating an environment conducive to learning, helping students grasp concepts, and providing feedback that assists learners in achieving their objectives. Before the 1960s, researchers concentrated on determining which factors impacted a teacher's effectiveness, including personality traits, age, knowledge, and training (Kyriacou, 2009). Goh (2012) outlined that effective teachers demonstrate a) monitoring expectations, b) providing clear objectives and rules, c) encouraging student participation, d) breaking down instructional units into smaller assignments, and e) providing frequent feedback.

In order to motivate children to learn languages and improve their language skills, teachers need to have the necessary qualities and skills. Several studies have investigated the link between effective English teaching and teacher quality (Wang, 2021). The research has shown that the quality of teachers is positively correlated with the degree of students' English proficiency (Goe & Stickler, 2008; Seebruck, 2015; Wang, 2021). The studies found that teachers with solid communication skills, knowledge of the subject matter, and good teaching practices are more effective in encouraging their students to learn a foreign language. With the worldwide demand for English as a second language, teacher quality has become a pressing concern in education. Teacher quality and abilities are crucial to the success of L2 learning, emphasising the importance of addressing this issue.

Teacher Quality

Teacher quality is a multidimensional concept encompassing a range of characteristics, skills, and behavioural patterns that contribute to effective teaching (Hamid et al., 2012). Knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogical abilities, classroom management, communication skills, and student involvement are some of the aspects of teacher quality that are most widely cited (Bradford et al., 2021; Goe & Stickler, 2008; Hamid et al., 2012). These qualities make teachers more likely to create a positive learning environment, engage students, and promote language learning. Research has shown that teacher quality significantly impacts student learning outcomes (Bardach & Klassen, 2020; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Goe & Stickler, 2008).

Language education researchers have long been interested in the attributes of effective or high-quality teachers (Hamid et al., 2012; Kepol, 2017; Uygun, 2013). Even though 'effective teaching' and 'quality teachers' are inextricably linked, numerous researchers have concluded that it is highly challenging to accurately define effective teaching and quality teachers due to many factors (Hamid et al., 2012; Kyriacou, 2009; Uygun, 2013). The conventional method of teaching languages was based on a scientifically established notion of instruction, supported by empirical studies that either operationalised learning principles, relied on tried-and-true models of particular teaching techniques, or served as models for effective teaching behaviours

(Freeman & Richards, 1993). Most of the earlier studies used the process-product paradigm, which looked for the essential teaching behaviours that might be connected to particular learning outcomes and proposed that if these teaching behaviours were successfully and effectively implemented on a large scale, student learning would be ensured. However, many researchers argued that focusing on student outcomes ignores and undervalues teachers' distinctive experiences and perspectives. Instead, it creates a decontextualised, abstract body of knowledge that disregards the complexity of interpersonal communication and reduces instruction to a series of quantifiable activities.

A plethora of research has identified the attributes of effective English language teachers. They include empathy, linguistic competency, intercultural competence, content knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge. Content knowledge is necessary for teachers to comprehend the subject matter and create engaging, relevant courses. On the other hand, pedagogical knowledge entails comprehending how students learn and using that information to create efficient teaching methods (Borg, 2015; Ikromova, 2020; Rahman et al., 2020). The capacity to navigate cultural differences and effectively communicate with various student groups is known as intercultural competence. In addition, having linguistic proficiency is essential for communicating with students and demonstrating good language use.

In a recent study, Mohammaditabar et al. (2020) discovered thirteen themes connected

to successful teaching characteristics based on a content analysis of 23 language training textbooks. These traits include instructional expertise, interpersonal skills, critical reasoning, empathy, eloquence, subject matter expertise, excitement, respect, humour, consciousness, fairness, authenticity, and physical characteristics. In Australia, effective classroom management, interactive or effective communication with students, and continual progress concerning knowledge and best practices were all defined in the National Framework for Professional Standards of Teaching in 2003. According to findings from earlier studies on the best teacher performances, good classroom management, commitment, and responsibility are among the best classroom practices for teachers (Brown, 2004). Brown stressed that a teacher’s capacity to respond correctly to the student’s emotional, social, cultural, and cognitive demands is necessary for good classroom management.

Research Paradigm

The present research adopts Van Manen’s (1990, 2007) hermeneutic phenomenology as the research paradigm, focusing on

interpreting the meaning and significance of individuals’ lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. As a research approach, phenomenology explores the lifeworld to comprehensively understand the nature and meaning of everyday experiences. This specific study aims to explore the lived experiences of ESL teachers in their journey of becoming language teachers and identify the attributes they perceive as essential for a high-quality English language teacher. This investigation is prompted by the existing literature gap, which lacks expert teachers’ perspectives in the L2 context, particularly regarding the tacit knowledge in the teaching profession and the social-emotional aspects.

Various concepts, including experience, expertise, knowledge, competence, training, and professional growth, have been linked to various aspects of teacher quality (Kepol, 2017). Hamid et al. (2012) proposed a model of teacher quality in which they claimed that teachers’ cognitive ability and personality influenced their performance in classroom management, commitment and responsibility (Figure 1).

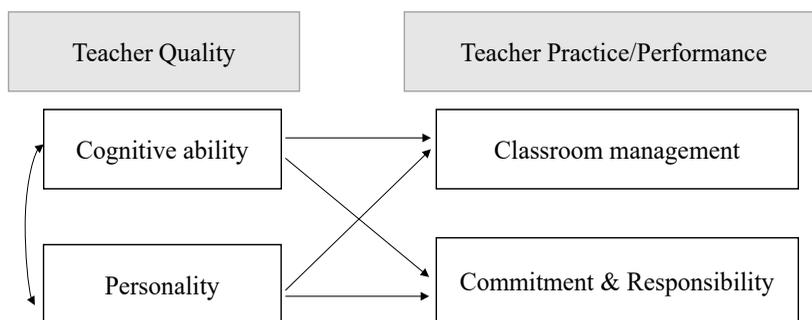


Figure 1. Initial model of teacher quality and performance (Adapted from Hamid et al. 2012)

Hamid et al. (2012) found that a teacher’s cognitive abilities and personality are needed to show performance in classroom management. Nevertheless, they concluded that a teacher’s personality alone cannot predict their teaching commitment and responsibilities. While the researchers agree on the role of teachers’ cognitive abilities and personality in teacher quality, their research seems to lack descriptions of how affective or social-emotional aspects contribute to a teacher’s professional development. More recent studies have urged the importance of looking into social-emotional aspects as they are crucial for positive development and educational and occupational attainment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2015; Schoon, 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

On January 5, 2022, we initiated the research application process for schools and

institutions under the Ministry of Education (MoE) using the Educational Research Application System version 2.0 (eRAS 2.0). Approval to conduct the study within local educational institutions was granted by the MoE on January 19, 2022, followed by approval from the Sabah State Education Department (JPNS) on January 27, 2022. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic at the time, the Sabah State Education Department could not grant permission for in-person data collection. Consequently, online interviews were conducted via a suitable virtual platform. We secured the participation of five secondary schools and two teacher training centres in the study. This research employed purposeful sampling to ensure the relevance and value of the selected sample in addressing our research questions. The sample consisted of two groups: (1) experienced teachers with over ten years of teaching experience and (2) administrators or stakeholders (see Figure 2).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten highly experienced English language teachers (T1 to T10) and five stakeholders holding various roles in the education sector, including department heads, administrative assistants, and teacher trainers (SH1 to SH5). These participants shared their perspectives on quality teaching based on their experiences as language educators. Within our study, experienced teachers were those who had been promoted under the Excellent Teacher Scheme or appointed as subject experts.

Additionally, we employed criterion sampling to select participants meeting

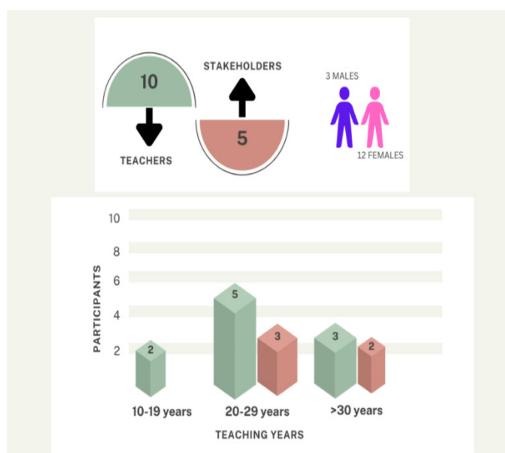


Figure 2. Distribution of working experience of teachers and stakeholders

specific qualifications and characteristics, as detailed in Table 1.

The sample size aligns with recommendations for qualitative research involving expert participants, as suggested by Guest et al. (2006, 2020). They proposed that an appropriate sample size for qualitative research typically ranges from six to 12 participants within a homogenous group, aiming to reach data saturation. Guest et al. (2006, 2020) found that approximately 80% of codes emerged within the first six transcripts, increasing to 92% in the subsequent six transcripts. They observed that new themes rarely surfaced after analysing twelve

interviews and noted consistent code frequency variation by the twelfth interview. By applying these guidelines in our study, data saturation was achieved through iterative data collection and thematic analysis. We recorded and transcribed interviews verbatim, continuously cross-referencing them with earlier interviews. After analysing interviews nine to ten, no novel themes emerged, and the provided information became repetitive, indicating data saturation. This confirmation was substantiated by a peer debriefing session involving two expert reviewers in the field of education who validated the identified themes.

Table 1
Criteria of research participants

Criteria for Experienced Teachers	Criteria for Administrators/ Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English-option teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience Graduated from the Institute of Teacher Education (IPG) or IPTA Had experiences as either an Excellent Teacher (<i>Guru Cemerlang</i>) or a Subject Expert in English (<i>Ketua Panitia</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Head of Department Administrative assistant Programme Coordinator Teacher trainers

Ethics

The study adhered to standard guidelines for the ethical conduct of research and received approval from the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM), the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE) and the institutions where the research occurred. Participants were allowed to ask questions and withdraw from the study at any time and were guaranteed anonymity

to ensure their participation would have no impact on their current positions or status.

Data Analysis

Using the framework method by Gale et al. (2013), we used a hybrid approach to analysis, allowing themes to be established deductively from previous literature and inductively from the experiences and perspectives of research participants. At the initial stage, two research team members

responsible for transcribing the data listened to the audio recording and read and edited the interview transcripts several rounds to resolve any inconsistencies. Next, using Atlas.ti version 22 (CAQDAS) to do open and second coding the researchers highlighted the transcripts' segments and labelled them with relevant codes. The codes were then categorised based on similarities, and any redundancy was resolved. The

codes and segments of the transcript were then transferred into a matrix table to establish the themes. The research team had several meetings and peer-debriefing discussions of participants' responses, codes, and irregular cases, facilitating agreement on recurring themes. Figure 3 shows the diagrammatic representation of the data analysis procedure.

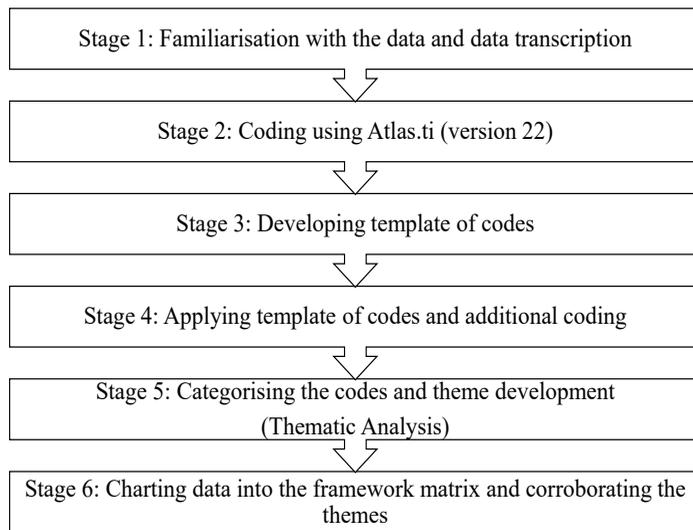


Figure 3. Data analysis procedure (adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2022; Gale et al., 2013; Saldana, 2013)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis reveals five main themes related to attributes of quality English language teachers: Passion for teaching, cognitive abilities, social-emotional competencies, personality traits and the concept of 'going beyond just teaching'. Figure 4 illustrates the key attributes of a quality English language teacher.

Passion for Teaching

The works of Carbonneau et al. (2008), Fried (2001), and Day (2004) highlight

that passion plays a crucial role in effective teaching by serving as a strong motivation towards a particular activity, driving a love for the subject matter, and drawing teachers towards the challenges and possibilities of their students. When asked about the essential qualities of an excellent English language teacher, most participants (37 quotes) and four out of five stakeholders identified a passion for teaching as the primary criterion for an excellent English language teacher.

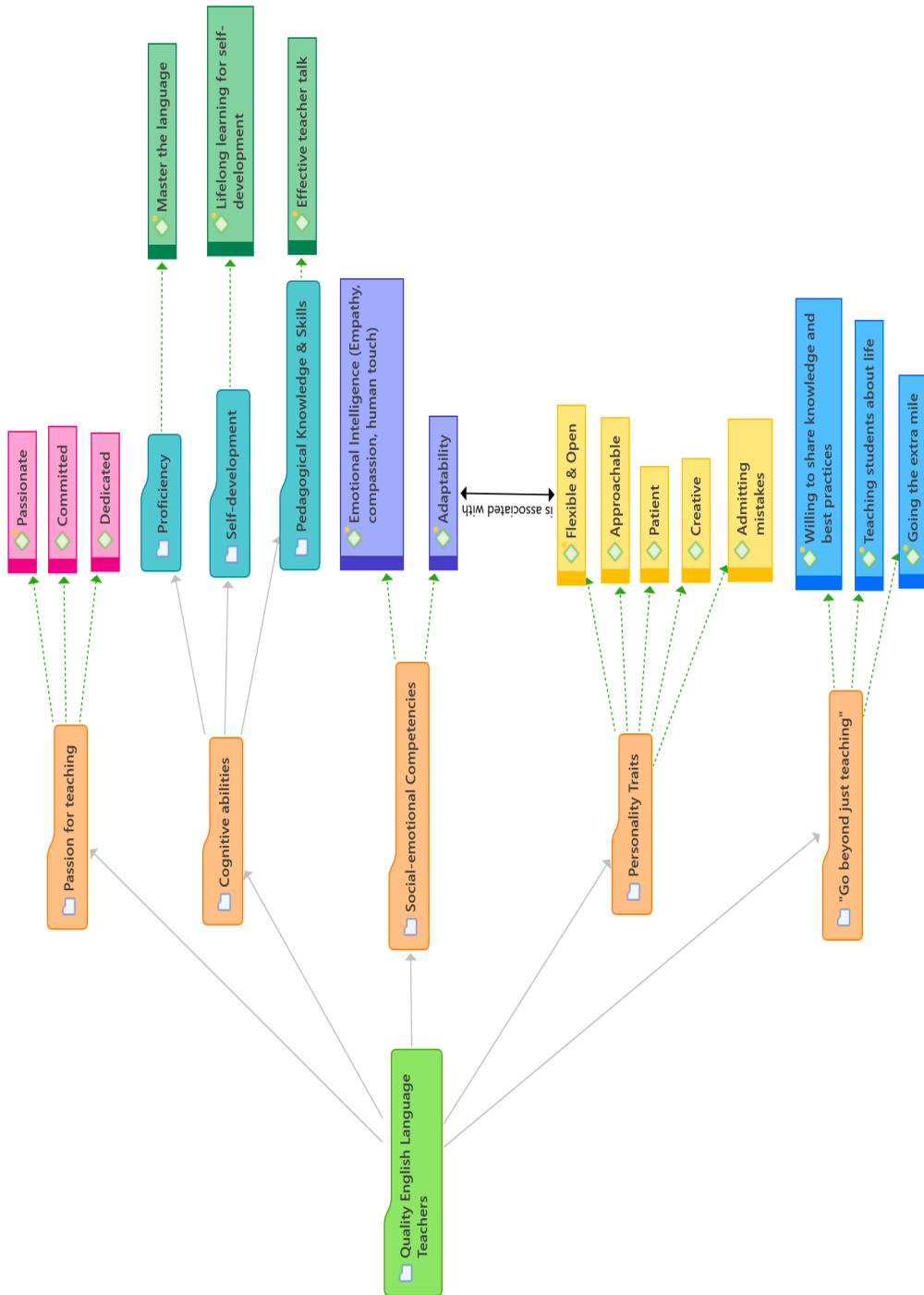


Figure 4. Quality English language teachers

This finding was surprising, considering the huge emphasis on proficiency as the main criterion in recruiting English language teachers. However, in-depth interviews and member-checking procedures in this study revealed that passion for teaching is an essential attribute of a quality English language teacher, without which a language teacher would not be able to perform their tasks well, would not create a positive impact on their students and would deem unfit as a quality teacher. Day (2004) further explained that when students recognise their teacher's fervent dedication to a particular field of study and the preservation of high standards within it, it becomes simpler for them to approach their work with a sense of gravity, thereby making learning an issue of following the teacher's inspiring example rather than one of coercion and submission.

In one of the interviews, T6 mentioned that passion for teaching is crucial as it is the only factor that provides the necessary support for them to overcome the difficulties of the profession; without it, "I think I would have quit so long ago". Such emphasis on passion was further iterated by SH4, who said that lack of passion might negatively impact a teacher's performance, thus making it imperative to possess the desire and passion for teaching. The study's participants acknowledged that passion for teaching is the driving force behind a teacher's improvement and effectiveness. The experienced educators maintained that it keeps them going in the profession, besides being the most crucial aspect of being a quality English language teacher.

In another interview, T4 mentioned that having a passion for the subject and the students is necessary, without which they can "kill the teaching profession". Even though T4 mentioned the possibility for a teacher to be "a good teacher without passion", true success in teaching requires a genuine passion for the profession that extends beyond the classroom. A consensus among the participants in this study is that being passionate is linked to being committed to teaching, which involves being willing to learn along the journey, wanting the best for the students and doing things for the sake of the students. T6 supported this statement and described her commitment to finding out how to solve a problem, trying it out with the students and finding satisfaction.

"I love the part whereby I see a problem, and then even while driving, I'll be thinking about how to dissect that, how to get through to the students and then try it out in class. Then when you see it well, oh, I tell you that feeling is so great. You know, that they can do it because of this way you thought of." (T6)

This finding echoes the statement by Mart and Deniz (2013), whereby they claimed that a teacher who is passionate about their subject could consider a problem from various angles and is constantly engaged in their classroom. In conclusion, a passionate teacher will work hard to establish a close teacher-learner relationship to create an exciting and positive learning environment that facilitates student

development through a supportive learning environment.

Cognitive Abilities

A recurrent theme in the interviews was a general agreement amongst interviewees that a quality teacher's second attribute was related to cognitive abilities. Two sub-themes related to cognitive abilities emerged from the analysis: the proficiency level of the English language teachers and pedagogical knowledge and skills. When asked about the role of proficiency in affecting the student's performance, the participants were unanimous in the view that proficiency was essential to becoming a quality English language teacher and ineffective teaching. This observation could affect the current policy where novice and in-service teachers must achieve the C1 level under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). SH3 mentioned that:

“The teachers, they have to afford the CEFR level. They have to achieve C1. C1 right? For lecturers, we have to achieve C2; C2 is a band six. Well, yeah, I guess when you talk about quality, like what you said just now proficiency, comes first.”

As the source of knowledge, the teachers are the focal point for the students, and how they communicate will influence how they learn and absorb information. This view was echoed by T1, who said:

“It does have an effect whether directly or indirectly, that's not really the point,

but you are the source of knowledge. You are the point of focus for your students. So how you project your language is how the students will simulate.” (T1)

Such emphasis on the importance of the teacher's proficiency is poignant, as it may affect the classroom's instruction and the teacher's self-confidence. As one interviewee put it:

“Of course, you should have at least above-average proficiency, definitely. Because some students they're quite proficient in English and once they realise that you make mistakes or you're not as good, they will really look down on you.” (T5)

These excerpts provide essential insights into the importance of language proficiency for becoming a quality English language teacher. It should be noted that the stakeholders mentioned proficiency slightly more than the school teachers, possibly due to the current policy. Proficiency is vital, and teachers who make mistakes or are not as skilled in English may affect classroom instruction and be looked down on.

Another significant aspect of cognitive abilities is pedagogical content knowledge and skills. According to Ikromova (2020), pedagogical content knowledge involves the teacher's understanding of the subject matter, teaching techniques, psychology, communication skills, professional autonomy, pedagogical approach, and personal values and beliefs. On the other hand, pedagogical skills are those connected

to teaching and learning that are crucial for teachers, such as creating adequate lesson plans, effectively managing one's classes, selecting an appropriate teaching-learning technique, and acting as a learning support system for the students (Rahman et al., 2020). Participants in this study stressed the need for teachers to be reasonably good in both pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

“You have to know both, and you have to know both equally good in order to be a good teacher. You cannot be knowing knowledge, but the pedagogical skills are zero. So, knowledge will not reach the student. You might have all the pedagogical skills, you have all the activities, and interesting activities in the classroom, but you don't have the content; it will not be good because the students will not learn anything... So, a good teacher, a good English teacher should have a balance of both content knowledge and also pedagogical skills...” (SH4)

The importance of pedagogical knowledge and skills is also in tandem with the standards stipulated in the Malaysian Teacher Standards (MTS) established in 2009, where teachers are expected to have sound knowledge of the subject matter, curriculum and co-curriculum to teach effectively and to exhibit skills of teaching and learning, particularly in planning, implementing and evaluating their lessons (Goh & Wong, 2015).

Social-Emotional Competencies

Another prominent finding to emerge from the analysis of the attributes of a quality ELT is Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Teachers with a high EQ can better connect with their students, understand their needs, and create a supportive learning environment. EQ enables teachers to recognise their students' emotions and respond appropriately, leading to better engagement and learning outcomes. In this study, participants have highlighted the importance of having and showing empathy, compassion and human touch when interacting with the students, as this would affect the teacher-learner relationships and may be a driving factor towards successful teaching and learning. One of the experienced teachers, T3, described that EQ plays a significant role in a teacher's life.

“I'm a strong believer of Daniel Goleman. Emotional intelligence, because we were talking about IQ, but we've forgotten about EQ... Emotional quotient...I think nowadays some of the teachers, they actually lack of EQ... They focus more on the IQ, but some of them are really lack of EQ; this is through my observation...So, those are the elements that been left out in a teacher. So, EQ plays a very huge role in teacher's life as well... It's not only IQ, but EQ as well (*sic*).” (T3)

The view suggests that EQ is crucial for teachers to connect with their students, understand their needs, create a supportive learning environment, manage behaviour,

handle stress, and maintain professionalism. Therefore, teachers should develop their EQ and IQ to become effective educators. A similar belief was expressed by SH5, where personalised human touch in the classroom can eventually make the students more interested in learning:

“So, all this while yes, I had a case, I mean, students who are not interested to learn. But the thing that I put in mind is to control their heart... Once you control that human touch, you give that human touch; something else will be coming later.”

The results reported here reveal the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ)

in delivering effective English language teaching (ELT). To date, there were some suggestions from previous studies that teachers’ affective empathy would positively impact the students’ motivation to learn (Aldrup et al., 2022; Weisz et al., 2020). In addition, the teachers who participated in this study also believed that understanding the students’ problems is needed so that teachers can give helpful advice and give them something to look forward to so that they will have the motivation to come to school. These results highlight that EQ is important in building a good teacher-student relationship.

Table 2
Personality traits

Personality traits	Verbatim from Teachers	Verbatim from Stakeholders
Approachable	“We have to be friendly, but not too friendly. We have to talk to them. We have to create like a non-threatening environment with the students. Especially nowadays that we have to encourage them to improve their skills, especially when it comes to communication.” (T9)	“You can be their friends. You see. It doesn't mean that I'm a teacher, the more authoritative one, all the instruction would be coming from me and you will not take into consideration whatever suggestions that might come from your students.” (SH5)
Flexible or open	“I've learned that rigidity doesn't work, flexibility works with students...When you put up a strong, rigid front, they will reply in kind. So, if we goofed around a bit, there was a reply in kind, but that breaks down the barrier and I can get to them easier...Over the years I've learned to be less rigid, more flexible, and then open to suggestions.” (T1)	“So, if you want to be a good teacher, a good teacher, regardless of what subject you are teaching, again, you need to have the attitude to be open to whatever you are given to...if you are given so many tasks, take it positively. That's the attitude that I think a good teacher should have.” (SH5)

Table 2 (Continue)

Personality traits	Verbatim from Teachers	Verbatim from Stakeholders
Creative	“So, you have to be very creative with your classes. You know, you have to engage them in the multi-sensory lessons. You can't just expect them to sit down and read... and do exercises. That is really a recipe for disaster for your class.” (T1)	-
Admitting mistakes	“And telling them it's nothing wrong if you have made a mistake in class...the moment you say class, I'm so sorry, I made a mistake. It should be like this...The moment you say that...the students will respect you more.” (T8)	-
Patient	“Patience. (laughs) Okay. Being a teacher, you need bucket pools of patience...” (T1)	“So, we have to adapt well to that situation. And of course, patience.” (SH1)

Personality Traits

Some personality traits were associated with quality English language teachers, including being approachable, flexible or open, creative, admitting mistakes, and patient. This result ties nicely with previous studies that prove personality is one of the factors in quality teachers and effective teaching (Hamid et al., 2012; Ikromova, 2020; Mohammaditabar et al., 2020). According to Hamid et al. (2012), a teacher’s personality includes their attitudes toward teaching, drive to support students’ growth and development, commitment to professional ethics and discipline, and understanding of the personal relevance and significance of education for each student. Table 2 summarises these traits together with verbatim evidence from the interviews.

The findings above demonstrated two things. First, being approachable or friendly was deemed an essential personality as it would help get the students interested in learning the subject and build a sense of trust and good rapport with the students. One teacher even explicitly stated that a teacher needs to approach or try to befriend the problematic student because they believe that once a teacher diplomatically tackles the disciplinary problems among the students, students would likely give their attention to the teacher. Second, a flexible teacher was described as someone capable of tailoring their lesson plans to the needs of the students, allowing lessons to have a much looser structure, and taking into account the students’ suggestions or feedback when deciding their classroom activities

or making immediate adjustments to suit classroom circumstances. It is especially important in an L2 setting where students in the classroom come from various cultural backgrounds with different abilities.

‘Going Beyond Just Teaching’

In our research, we have identified a fascinating concept that we refer to as “going beyond just teaching”. It refers to instructional methods that transcend the traditional classroom setting and involve teachers’ actions and intentions outside this context. We contend that this theme warrants a category of its own because it encompasses teachers’ willingness to share their knowledge, best practices, and dedication to going the extra mile for their students. In essence, this study manages to discover three critical practices that are categorised as “going beyond teaching”: the teacher’s willingness to share knowledge and best practices, the willingness to go the extra mile for the benefit of their students, and the desire to teach students valuable life lessons.

Three of the stakeholders mentioned that the desire to share knowledge is one of the signs of an expert teacher. Similarly, two experienced teachers described how they had reached a stage where good classroom practices should be shared with others to help them solve classroom problems via innovations and conferences. T10 mentioned that:

“...I’m into action research, where I use my students as my client; I find

ways to overcome their problems by writing a research paper for that...I joined competitions and present what I did in my class... I show others how I overcome certain problems in my class. I brand it and I show it to others and help others to overcome the same problems in their class by using my innovation.”

Illustrating going the extra mile for the students, one experienced teacher recounted a difficult student being rude in class and facing a week-long suspension from school. Instead of punishing the student, the teacher went to the student’s parents’ house to investigate if there were any underlying problems and encouraged the student to return to school. This instance exemplifies the teacher’s willingness to go the extra mile for their students.

In addition, teaching life lessons and raising students’ awareness of the world beyond the classroom is also seen as an act of a fully transformed expert teacher. It involves various roles to expand their expertise and knowledge beyond the classroom context. T4 mentioned that:

“Teaching is no more like just a book. It’s more like, it’s, this is a living study thing. We don’t just look at books. You have to go beyond; now it’s more like life-learning. It’s no more just the core subject, but it’s more on life...You see as a teacher, you are a mother. Yeah. You’re even a planner, a counsellor, and then you also, yeah, you do a lot of things. Even nursing also, you have to do (sic).” (T4)

From the results, affective factors such as passion, socio-emotional competence, and personality traits are essential to developing a quality English language teacher. Thus, cultivating passion among teachers and developing their social-emotional competencies should be recognised and made explicit in teacher training programs. The findings demonstrate that teacher educators must formally expose prospective teachers to this tacit knowledge to advance their careers. Focusing on these components is crucial because the findings of this current study have shown that these affective factors are the essence of good quality teachers and, hence, the ‘jewels’ of the teacher education curriculum.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we argue that a teacher’s affective awareness of the student’s needs and passion for teaching could be extended as crucial attributes of a quality English language teacher. One of the contributions of this study is the inclusion of the role of passion, emotional intelligence, and social-emotional competencies in considering and looking at the quality of an English language teacher compared to previous studies which focused on cognitive abilities and personality traits. The knowledge gained from this study advances our understanding of the qualities required to don a teacher’s hat and those needed to remain and thrive in the teaching field. Prospective teachers can benefit from the study’s findings by gaining awareness of expert teachers’ responsibilities, challenges, and strategies.

Cognitive abilities, including content knowledge and pedagogical skills, and social-emotional competencies (SEC), such as building positive teacher-student rapport, are highlighted as essential for effective English language teaching. In addition, contrary to the gap found in previous literature, teachers and stakeholders were found to equally emphasise social-emotional competencies alongside cognitive abilities as the main attributes of a quality teacher.

Thus, the study has contributed to an integrative model of teacher quality encompassing teachers’ passion for teaching, social-emotional competencies, cognitive abilities, personality traits and the concept of ‘going beyond teaching’ as multidimensional criteria when discussing teacher quality (Figure 4). This study suggests a need to develop a more comprehensive and holistic assessment of a teacher’s professionalism or competency that considers not just their pedagogical ability and academic achievement but also other affective factors like emotional intelligence and social skills.

The study underscores the importance of restructuring ESL teacher training curricula to emphasise passion, empathy, adaptability, creativity, and innovation in problem-solving. This shift in focus, nurturing the “teacher’s soul,” is crucial for producing high-quality English language educators passionate about holistic student development. There is a significant need to integrate SEC into teacher training and professional development programs. Explicit instruction and frameworks such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social

Emotional Learning (CASEL) or the Domains and Manifestations of Social-emotional Competences (DOMASEC) can guide the development of SEC (Boyatzis, 2018; Schoon, 2021) tailored to the local context, aligning with Malaysian Teacher Standards (MTS) and National Education Policy (NEP). SEC integration should involve sequenced, active, focused, and explicit instructional methods to ensure comprehensive development.

These implications collectively emphasise the importance of teacher involvement in policy decisions, the significance of social-emotional competencies, and the need for a dynamic and holistic approach to teacher training and development. By embracing these recommendations, the education system can better prepare teachers to meet the diverse needs of students and adapt to the evolving landscape of English language teaching.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, although widely accepted, the nature of the phenomenological study, which mainly uses in-depth interviews, resulted in fewer participants to get more transferable results. Future research should consider expanding the participant sample to include a wider range of individuals, including early-career teachers, to add a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Furthermore, it is essential to understand the intricate relationship between teacher quality attributes, particularly social-emotional competencies (SEC), and their impact on teachers' performance, classroom management, and student-teacher

relationships. Although some research has shown correlations between teacher SEC and students' academic achievements (Schoon, 2021; Goe & Stickler, 2008), there is a need for empirical studies to establish causal relationships in the context of ESL teacher education. Future research endeavours should look into these correlations, elucidate the distinct facets of SEC, and refine assessment models to suit diverse contexts. It will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these attributes shape effective teaching practices and teacher-student dynamics.

Nevertheless, this study has contributed to a fresh perspective and provided in-depth descriptions of teacher quality. It has also enriched the existing body of knowledge in teacher quality studies, which have predominantly relied on self-assessment questionnaires rated by students and student-teachers.

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