

**In the Name of God**



دانشگاه علامه طباطبائی

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Department of English Language and Literature

# **Exploring the Characteristics of an Effective EFL Teacher as Perceived by University and High School Teachers and Students in Iran**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

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we hereby certify that thesis by

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entitled

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Be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
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**To my beloved family,  
with deepest gratitude**

## **Abstract**

There is a growing interest in the teacher characteristics from the perception of different groups. However, very few studies have been done regarding the influence of teacher's and learner's characteristics and experiences on their perceptions of an effective teacher in Iran (Babai Shishavan, 2010; Jahangiri, 2008; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009)

This study attempted to explore the characteristics of an effective English language teacher as perceived by teachers, learners and their parents with different backgrounds. This research also aimed to investigate if the gender, teacher education level, teacher experience, learner years of English education, and parent education level factor play a role in the nature of the characteristics of the an effective language teacher. To this end, the questionnaire of effective teacher characteristics, originally developed by Kadha (2009), was used for data collection in this study. The participants were four groups: university English teachers, high school English teachers, high school students, high school student parents. The results showed that there were similarities and differences in the perceptions of teachers, students and their parents about the qualities of a good language teacher. The results of the current study also failed to find relationship between gender, teacher education level, teacher experience,

learner years of English education, parent's education level, and perceptions of an effective language teacher.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## **1.1. Overview**

This chapter deals with a brief background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, purpose of the study. Then it presents the research questions, null hypotheses, and definition of the key terms. Finally, limitations of the study are explained.

## **1.2 . Background**

A good teacher and his/her actions in the classroom play a critical role in provoking effective and efficient learning on the part of the students (Markley, 2004; as cited in Babai Shishavan 2010). Effective learning is highly dependent on effective teachers. Effective teachers are essential for efficient educational systems and to increase teaching and learning quality. Moreover, teachers have a fundamental role in their learners' academic achievement and student outcomes (Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijse & Robinson, 2004; Lasley II, Siedentop & Yinger, 2006; Rockoff, 2004; as cited in Babai Shishavan 2010).

Rice (2003) and Wayne and Youngs (2003) state that teachers have certain characteristics that influence their effectiveness in the classroom. However, effective teachers can be interpreted by different characteristics by different people. Therefore, determining the characteristics of an effective teacher is a

difficult task. Teachers, students, and their parents might have different and sometimes contradictory perceptions about effective teacher characteristics.

As stated in Bulger, Mohr and Walls (2002), teaching effectiveness is defined in terms of the relation between a teacher's subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. They maintained,

1) an individual may possess a substantial amount of subject-matter knowledge, yet be unable to design and implement instructional methods to enhance student learning due to a lack of pedagogical ability; and 2) conversely, an individual may possess some generic pedagogical skills, yet have limited subject-matter knowledge and again be predisposed to ineffective teaching (p.1)

According to Thompson , Randsell and Rousseau (2005), many studies conclude that effective teachers must understand pedagogy (Bohn, Roehrig & Pressley, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Franklin, 1992; Minor, Witcher, James, & Onwuegbuzie, 2002; Stewart, Evans, & Kaczynski, 1997; Thibodeau & Hillman, 2003), maximize the time spending on teaching (Bohn et al., 2004; Stewart et al., 1997), and possess content knowledge(Minor et al., 2002). Teachers also need teaching skills and behavior management (Bohn et al., 2004; Minor et al., 2002; Stewart et al., 1997; Thibodeau & Hillman, 2003). Other



characteristics related to effective teacher is student-centered instruction (Minor et al., 2002) that is appropriate for students' level of development (Franklin, 1992), or supportive of their needs (Wentzel, 2002), good communication ability (McKay, 1997; Sachs, 2004; Thibodeau et al., 2003), respecting students (McKay, 1997; Thibodeau et al., 2003), being enthusiastic (Minor et al., 2002), having high expectations for students (McKay, 1997), motivating students (Bohn et al., 2004), awareness of socio-cultural differences (Sachs, 2004), professional and ethical acting (Minor et al., 2002), perceived efficacy (Enderlin-Lampe, 1997; Sachs, 2004; Wasicsko, 2002), taking risks (Sachs, 2004), and good preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Evans, Stewart, Mangin, & Bagley, 2001).

Therefore, there is not any agreement on effective teacher characteristics. Teachers act on based on their beliefs and assumptions. Then their perceptions about an effective teacher influence their instruction and class management. Students have their own beliefs and expectations of an effective teacher. Furthermore, it sounds to be a relationship between learner's and teacher's characteristics and their perceptions of an effective teacher. Different groups such as teachers/ students/parents, males/ females, experienced/less-experienced teachers

have different views on an effective teacher. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate effective teacher from perspectives of these groups.

### **1.3. Statement of the Problem**

There is a gap in understanding the needs of learners based on their characteristics in Iran. Very few studies have been done regarding the influence of teacher's and learner's characteristics and experiences on their perceptions of an effective teacher in Iran (Babai Shishavan, 2010; Jahangiri, 2008; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009)

The first step is exploring effective language teacher characteristics that may contribute to effective learning. The second step is to find out which of these characteristics are perceived to be effective by different groups. The present study identified effective teacher characteristics as perceived by different groups. According to Chacón (2005) teacher's beliefs, perceptions, and assumptions about teaching affect the way he/she understands and organizes instruction. Donaghue (2003) stated, "teachers' beliefs influence the acceptance and uptake of new approaches, techniques, and activities, and therefore play an important part in teacher development". Rios (1996) suggested that teachers' beliefs have the most profound and intensive

influence on their language teaching process (as cited in Lin, 2010). In every language-teaching context, teachers have different expressed teaching beliefs that influence their decisions and their instructional judgments.

According to Horwitz (1988), perceptions of learners about learning and teaching also need to be examined. Their beliefs about language learning are associated with understanding expectations of the course, and their commitment to the class. Moreover, Cotterall (1999) believes that learner assumptions inform teachers about different types of learner needs. Horwitz (1990), Kern (1995), and Schulz (1996) have argued that the disagreement between FL students' and teachers' expectations and perceptions can negatively influence the students' satisfaction with the language classroom. Williams and Burden (1997) claimed that learners' perceptions and interpretations have the greatest influence on achievement and outcome. They stated that sometimes there is mismatch between students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and teachers' intentions.

Dörnyei (2001) and Horwitz (1987) believe that when a teacher and his or her students have opposing views, the students may lack confidence in the teacher's ability. Without this confidence, effective learning is unlikely. Therefore, teachers need to discover mismatches between their actions and

student expectations. In some cases, teachers may modify their teaching practice, but in other cases, teachers may correct the student views.

According to Noora (2008), the culture of teaching in Iran is primarily teacher-centered; there are limited opportunities for other stake holders such as learners to express their perceptions, views and expectations of a good and effective teacher. The learners are the most important individuals in the educational system and teachers try to fulfill their requirements. Therefore, understanding their expectations, dislikes, preferences, and learning styles help the teachers to revise the teaching techniques based on these factors.

The findings of different studies showed that perceptions about effective teacher characteristics depend on 1) where the study is done e.g. Iran, North America ; 2) who expresses the views, e.g. students, teachers, parents ; and 3) the field of the teachers e.g. language teachers. Therefore, this study investigated Iranian language teachers, students and their parents' conception of the qualities of the effective foreign language teacher.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study are significant from two perspectives: theoretical, and practical. On the theoretical level, this research attempts to list the characteristics of an effective language teacher. On the practical level, the