

Students' and lecturers' perceptions of the ideal English Language teacher

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Abstract

Many students at the secondary and even tertiary levels of education in Nigeria still perform lamentably poor in English both in examinations and even in daily usage. This has queried the quality of teachers of English and their teaching. Many teachers of English have the requisite qualifications and, possibly, experience to teach English in public schools, at least. However, students still perform poorly in English. Therefore, there is a need to examine other qualities, which teachers are expected to have from the perspective of teacher educators, and post-secondary school students. Using the survey research design, data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. The participants were 33 purposively selected secondary school graduates and 24 College of Education lecturers. The lecturers were participants at a UNICEF-sponsored workshop for teacher trainers in Nigeria. They were from five states in South-Western Nigeria. A thematic analysis and frequency counts showed that the most frequent qualities participants expected of teachers of English Language were professional and pedagogical skills, relational skills, communication skills and ethical behaviour.

Keywords: Communication, English, ethical, behaviour, ideal, teacher

Introduction

Although English is a second language in many English-Speaking African countries, it has assumed international status as a language of trade, entertainment, scientific communication, diplomatic interactions, sociocultural transactions and international education. Therefore, competence in English is pivotal to the successful operation and maximisation of the rights of citizenship locally and globally.

Because of the importance of English Language, it is compulsory in all tiers of education in Nigeria. Unfortunately, many students at the secondary and even tertiary levels of education in Nigeria still perform lamentably low in English both in examinations and even in daily usage. For example, the West African Examination Council (WAEC) (2019), in her Chief Examiners' Report, notes that on the average, students' English Language scores over the years has been 50 per cent. Specifically, the Council reports that candidates' scripts were replete with grammatical blemishes, discordant ideas, poor sentence construction and poor summarization skills. This has queried the quality of teaching and of teachers of English, which Richards (2017) confirms may have low levels of proficiency in the target language since most of them use English as a second language.

Since the minimum qualification to teach in a secondary school in Nigeria is a first degree (B.Ed, B.A. Ed, or BSc.Ed), it is assumed that many teachers of English have both the qualification and, possibly, the experience to teach English. However, since students still perform poorly in English, there is a need to study the perspectives of students and teacher trainers on the qualities of an ideal teacher of English. This could "... help the teachers to understand what the students expect from them and enable them to develop themselves accordingly"(Zamani & Ahangari, 2016, p.70).

The study used the backdrop of *Perception Theories* by Andrej Démuth (2013). According to Démuth,

Actually, the certainty of any statement is based on the trustworthiness of the authority that postulates it. Thus, if we want to believe our knowledge, we must know, where it is coming from, how it was being formed and how it was subsequently being proliferated. (p.13)

Démuth argues that perception is critical to human survival even though human perception is inadequate in many situations. Humans, according to the author are unable to perceive certain phenomena in the environment unaided. Démuth adds that since human perception could be unreliable, there is a need for multiple witnesses. Even at that, an error may not be absent. To counter this deficiency, the author highlights three possible approaches. First, it might be necessary to use a specially designed device to independently validate the perceptions of multiple witnesses. Another approach is to "...test the testimonies of senses by their mutual confrontation...."(p.14). Thus, inconsistencies become a red flag of possible errors. The third approach is to subject each of the witnesses and their testimonies to critical examination.

The understanding that a single perspective could be deficient in accuracy, informed the use of not just multiple witnesses, but also different classes of witnesses: students

and lecturers. The researchers selected students who have each had at least six years of learning English at the secondary school level. Since they have such a length of exposure to teachers of English, it was assumed that they would be credible witnesses. This also informed the researchers' choice of lecturers of colleges of education who themselves had not only studied English Language from the primary school to tertiary schools but have also trained teachers. Therefore, they could be expected to accurately describe the qualities of an ideal teacher of English Language.

Moreover, as Guilbault (2016, p. 132,) notes, "... in the school setting an understanding that the student is equivalent to a client or customer might lead to better teacher-learner instructional interactions." This confirms Taiwo's (2010) belief that firms could gain advantageous information when they seek the perspectives of their clientele. Therefore, the present study sought the opinions of Nigerian students as well as lecturers on what constitute the characteristics of ideal teachers of English Language. While many studies have assessed the characteristics of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), to the current researchers' knowledge, very few studies investigate the characteristics of the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, particularly studies located in Nigeria. This study could stir interest in that direction.

Although teachers are important in the education narrative, there are basic qualities expected of them by their employers, the school that produces them, parents and students themselves. Dinçera et al (2013) found that the major qualities of effective English Language teachers generally fell into socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge, and personality. Consequently, this review is organised under the following subheadings:

1. Teacher knowledge and pedagogical skills
2. Psychosocial characteristics
3. Students' versus teachers' perspectives

Teacher knowledge and pedagogical skills

Teachers acquire knowledge in the process of their training. They are teachers because society trusts that they can help others acquire knowledge and also reach higher levels of knowledge. Thus, Smith and Smith (2008) comment, "There is also, usually, an expectation that we have a good understanding of the subjects upon which we are consulted, and that we know something about the way of the world" (p.19). This implies that students and even society expect teachers to be knowledgeable not only about what they teach but also general knowledge. Therefore, Blömeke and Delaney (2014) reason that besides having a deep knowledge of the curriculum, suitable instructional materials, and students' entry behaviours, a teacher should have the skills to present the lesson excellently.

Furthermore, Shulman (1985) as cited by Blömeke and Delaney (2014) believes that teachers should have professional knowledge. This comprises content knowledge, pedagogical content, curricular and generic pedagogical knowledge. While content knowledge is what a teacher knows and students should learn in a specific subject (Glossary of Education Reforms, 2016), pedagogic content knowledge is the knowledge of what to teach and how to teach it. As opposed to generic pedagogical knowledge, which is the knowledge of the principles and the theories of learning and instruction, pedagogic content knowledge, according to Shulman (1985), is a confluence of content and pedagogical knowledge.

Some studies associate teachers' knowledge to enhanced students' performance. In a related study, Doró and Balla (2014) used a questionnaire to investigate the level of importance three different English teacher trainee groups at a Hungarian university attached to a list of EFL teacher characteristics. They found that while their respondents frequently labelled teacher knowledge as marginally important or unimportant, they considered very important “good target language vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, varied teaching methods and continuous professional development”(p.51).

Furthermore, Al-Issa (2017), in a qualitative study involving 63 English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals from 23 countries, investigated what qualities they believed teachers of English Language should have. The researcher found that, generally, respondents expected EFL teachers to be proficient in the English language, have good knowledge of the language, good communicative skills.

Broadly speaking, teaching is synonymous with pedagogy, even though the original meaning was the teaching of children (Smith, 2019). However, in current usage, the term has been expanded to cover all levels of learners (Smith, 2019). Therefore, pedagogy means the “interactions between teachers, students, and the learning environment and the learning tasks” (Smith, 2019). It includes all that a teacher does whether alone or in collaboration with others to facilitate learning. Some of such activities include lesson selection, lesson preparation, instructional material selection, and lesson delivery. Other activities that would define pedagogy include assessment scheduling and administration, class set induction, prior-knowledge activation and utilization, and class management (Voss, Kunter, & Baumert, 2011; Dinçera et al., 2013). Thus, UNESCO (2018) comments, “Effective teachers carefully plan and implement appropriate pedagogy” (p.1). Consequently, Timothy and Obiekezie (2019) recommend that, “It is incumbent on teacher trainers, especially those training teachers of English and Literature, to develop creative and innovative pedagogical strategies” (p.5).

Other important teacher characteristics include appropriate training, qualification, and experience. Martin (2006) found that teachers with the greatest level of teaching experience, training and interest in their teaching subject had the greatest positive influence on students' attitudes as well as achievement in the subject. However, the RAND Corporation (2010) reported that traditional standards of teacher quality such as qualification and experience had little influence on students' performance in reading and mathematics. They studied the connexion between teacher quality and students' achievement by analysing math and reading standards tests and other records for five years of elementary, middle, and high school students in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The study revealed that though the teacher is an important element in students' achievement, there was no direct relationship between teacher qualification, years of experience and students' achievement over time. The findings support, Buddin and Zamarro (2009) who found that possessing an advanced degree did not have a significant influence on pupils' performance.

Earlier studies, according to Goldhaber (2002), indicated that measurable teacher qualities such as qualification and experience accounted for only three per cent of students' achievement. On the other hand, 97 per cent could be attributed to non-tangible teacher characteristics like enthusiasm, commitment and skill in conveying knowledge to students. Interestingly, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) (2010) in the minimum standards for teachers requires teachers to show dedication, faithfulness, punctuality, conscientiousness, dependability and diligence in the discharge of their professional obligations. Therefore, Mart (2013) acknowledges that enthusiasm and commitment are the hallmarks of effective teachers:

Commitment is an essential element of successful teaching. Committed teachers are concerned with the development of their students and they profoundly struggle how to keep students' learning. They cultivate students' curiosity and interest in learning. Showing commitment to student learning can be an important factor in motivating students. ... The degree of loyalty of committed teachers have, toward their profession is one of their distinguished characters (p.436).

While investigating students' perception of effective English Language teachers, Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul (2012), using questionnaire and interviews surveyed low and high proficiency students at Bangkok University. They found out that effective and ineffective English Language teachers differed significantly in their pedagogical, organizational, communication as well as immediacy skills. Effective and non-effective teachers also differed significantly in their language proficiency. However, Papanastasiou (2001) noted that teachers' competence, teachers' personality, and teachers' quality combine with a variety of environmental variables to influence students' achievement.

Furthermore, Al-Issa (2017), in a qualitative study involving 63 ELT professionals from 23 countries, investigated what qualities they believed teachers of English Language should have. The researcher found that, generally, respondents expected EFL teachers to be proficient in the English language, have good knowledge of the language, and good communicative skills. Also, Febriyanti (2018) found that though students and teachers differed in their perceptions of an ideal teacher of English, teacher's communicative competence and the application of the communicative instructional strategies were the highest rated. A study by Mohammaditabar et al. (2019) supports this. They found that EFL teachers prioritised qualities such as having deep knowledge of the language and the ability to manage the class effectively. Consequently, Nayernia and Babayan (2019) recommend that employers should emphasise "language proficiency of teachers not only for maximizing teachers' efficacy of teaching but also for preventing teachers' from experiencing burnout"(p.13).

Psycho-social characteristics

Studies have explored the psychosocial characteristics of English Language teachers. For instance, Mahmoud and Thabet (2013) examined what Saudi and Yemeni college students of English perceived as the characteristics of good English teachers. The authors purposively selected participants. Although the Saudi and Yemeni students differed in their perceptions of what constituted the qualities of good English teachers, they agreed on the psycho-affective qualities such as being "patient, relaxed, good-tempered, fair, helpful, encouraging, respectful, kind, loving and caring"(p.72.). Also, Doró and Balla (2014), in their study of students who had just concluded secondary education and pre-service teachers who were doing their M.A., reported, "our informants did not report that effective foreign language teachers should know their students well or should have sound theoretical background to teaching"(p.51). Rather their respondents emphasized relational skills. Doró and Balla's respondents expected that a teacher of English-as-a-foreign-Language (EFL) should be "fair, enthusiastic, friendly, empathetic, patient, creative, flexible, consistent, loving and well-prepared"(p.52). Also, a recent study, though not particularly of language teachers but of teachers of vocational education, found that students esteemed lecturers' personality the most followed by social and emotional skills, while lecturers' knowledge was considered "less important" (Almzary & Al-alawneh, 2020, p.13)

In a quantitative study, Zamani and Ahangari (2016) investigated 60 Iranian students' perception of an effective English language teacher "based on four categories including English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, organization and communication skills, and socio-affective skills" (p.70). They found that students perceived socio-affective skills and organizational skills as most important.

In the same vein, Walker (2008), from a qualitative assessment of essays by a wide variety of undergraduates from North America, South America and Africa on the characteristics of their most memorable teachers, concluded that respondents were less concerned with the professional, pedagogical and academic endowments of a teacher than with their affective qualities. The most memorable teachers, according to Walker's findings, prepared well and were positive towards their jobs and students. Also, they were creative, approachable, friendly, and so on. Studies by Mullane (2014) as well as Timothy and Uguma (2017) also validate the importance of such affective variables to students.

In another study, 77 students from the Faculty of Letters and the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi responded to an essay question: "What are the characteristics of the ideal teacher?" The analysis of the essays showed that the students esteemed relational and communicational characteristics as the most important teacher qualities (Rusu, Soitub, & Panaitecet, 2012). Similarly, Ghasemi and Hashemi (2011) found that students expected English teachers to be supportive of students within and outside the school, have a sense of humour and possess high communicative proficiency.

Students' and teachers' perspectives

Since quality is a subjective attribute to measure, it has been argued that levels of education, culture, and gender could influence perceptions of quality (Zhang & Watkins, 2007). Studies, furthermore, show that teachers and students sometimes differ in their perceptions of what characteristics mark an ideal English language teacher (Finkbeiner, 2008). Therefore, this review includes studies that not only investigated students' perspectives about the ideal teacher of English but also studies that compare students' and teachers' perspectives.

One of such studies that compared teachers' and students' perceptions of the ideal English language teacher is by Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009). They compared teachers' and students' perception of what should be the qualities of effective English teachers. The result revealed that while teachers emphasized pedagogical and content knowledge, the students emphasized personality and relationship skills. Also, whereas male students emphasized relational qualities like kindness and friendliness, female students emphasized skillfulness.

In a related study, Al-Khairi (2015) found that students, irrespective of gender, extolled personality and professional characteristics in teachers of English. Similarly, Al-Mahrooqi et al (2015) compared the perceptions of 171 Omani students and 233 teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) on what constituted the qualities a good teacher of EFL. Students and teachers agreed that a good teacher should be

proficient in the English language and should treat students without discrimination. Kourieos and Evripidou (2013) also had similar findings.

Similarly, whereas Murtiningsih and Yogyakarta (2019) observed no direct match between teachers' and students' perceptions on the qualities of an ideal EFL teacher, both groups agreed that teachers should have pedagogical, interpersonal knowledge and skills as well as subject matter knowledge. Furthermore, a study by Külekçi, (2018) found that participants highly esteemed the use of authentic examples, adequate lesson preparation, clarity of lesson presentation, continuous self-development and deployment of appropriate instructional materials.

However, Bremner's subjects (2020) did not mention teacher language proficiency as one of the characteristics of the ideal teacher. Rather they preferred that a teacher of English should use modern pedagogies, especially the ones that emphasise teacher closeness and assistance.

Research questions

Three research questions guided the study. They are:

1. What attributes do students value most in their teacher of English?
2. What attributes do lecturers value most in a teacher of English?
3. To what extent are students and lecturers similar in their perceptions of the qualities of an ideal teacher of English Language?

Methodology

Data were collected from two sets of participants. The first set of participants were 24 lecturers (12 male, 12 female) from colleges of education in Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo states in Western Nigeria. They were participants at a UNICEF-sponsored workshop for teacher trainers in Nigeria. They were voluntary participants who responded to a verbal request for participation in the study. They filled a semi-structured questionnaire which had two sections: Section A and Section B. Section A required the participants to fill their demographic data like sex, years of experience, highest qualification and rank. In Section B, the lecturers were required to write freely about the qualities they would expect from their ideal teacher of English Language.

The second set of participants comprised 33 graduates of secondary schools in Nigeria, one of whom was on a holiday from the Republic of Cameroon. The students attended a holiday class preparatory to university entrance examination. They were 21 female and 12 male students. The researchers obtained permission from the director of the preparatory class to recruit participants. Afterwards, the researchers made an oral request to participants in the study. Volunteers filled and returned signed consent forms. Then, copies of semi-structured questionnaire were administered to them. The

first section of the questionnaire sought personal data about students' sex, ages and last class. In the second section, the students were required to write on the topic "What my ideal English Language teacher should be."

Ethical issues were considered and attended to during the study. Both the lecturers and the students separately filled consent forms. The forms specified the purpose of data collection, assured participants of their anonymity and their rights to discontinue from the study and to follow the progress of the study. The phone number of the corresponding author was provided to participants for further inquiries or requests. The Research and Publications Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, reviewed the study. The committee approved that the study did not violate the rights of the participants and was in consonance with rules guiding research by faculty and students of the university.

To answer the research questions, summaries of the handwritten responses from the participants were typed into Microsoft Word and saved. The authors received guidance from Braun and Clarke (2006) who counselled that the transcript should as much as possible represents the original. Each of the authors had access to the soft copy. The authors used the thematic analysis for its versatility (Clarke & Braun, 2013) and flexibility (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017), also, commend it as a means for processing and identifying themes in qualitative data.

To identify themes, each author read the responses several times to identify and highlight themes that emerged from the responses, using the Microsoft colour-highlighting tool. Colour codes were used for each identified theme. For instance, the authors used pink for relational skills, blue for knowledge of subject matter, purple for personal qualities/character, and red for academic qualification. The authors, then, met to compare notes. In addition, blind peer reviewers' comments on the authors' initial interpretations of the data further helped the authors to re-examine and modify some of their data interpretations.

To quantify the data, the authors prepared a frequency count of themes. This was done by identifying the number of participants who included the theme in their responses to the open-ended questionnaire. The authors subsequently converted the frequencies into percentages and presented the results in tables and figures.

Presentation of results

The results of the data analysis are presented in this section using both content analysis (qualitative) and simple percentages (quantitative). For clarity of interpretation, the authors established the following parameters of classifying responses: See table 1.

Table 1: Parameters of interpreting responses

S/N	Percentage of Respondents	Interpretation
1	80 -100	Extremely Important
2	70-79	Very Important
3	60 -69	Fairly Important
4	50 -59	Important
5	Less than 50	Marginally important

The authors restate each research question and present the results that follow.

Research question 1: What attributes do students value most in a teacher of English Language?

From the analysis of the qualitative data, the major themes that emerged in the order of importance (judged by the percentage of respondents who referenced the quality in their responses) were teacher pedagogical skills (83%), immediacy skills (70%), ethical behaviour (59%), communication skills (54%), and commitment to duty (38%), being models (30%). Others include personal grooming (21%) and knowledge of the subject matter (18%). Regarding pedagogical skills, students expected that teachers of English should coach students with past questions, allow students to express themselves, model what they teach, carry students along, give homework and cover the syllabus. One of the participants wrote:

The teacher must know his students' background of experience and their... differences. He must be able to use suitable strategies to pass across this instruction to students and able to control our class very well.

For immediacy, which has to do with how students perceive teachers as close or friendly (Mehrabiien, 2016), students' participants used the following expression to describe their ideal English Language teachers: "relate with students amicably", "interact with students", "cheerful", "loving", "caring", "make students laugh and enjoy the class", "a person loved by his students".

Ethical conduct and communication skills received equal ratings. A participant, for example, wrote, “My ideal English teacher should be a man of integrity, a man of his words, man of dignity and a man immune to dirty games”. Details are presented in Figure 1.

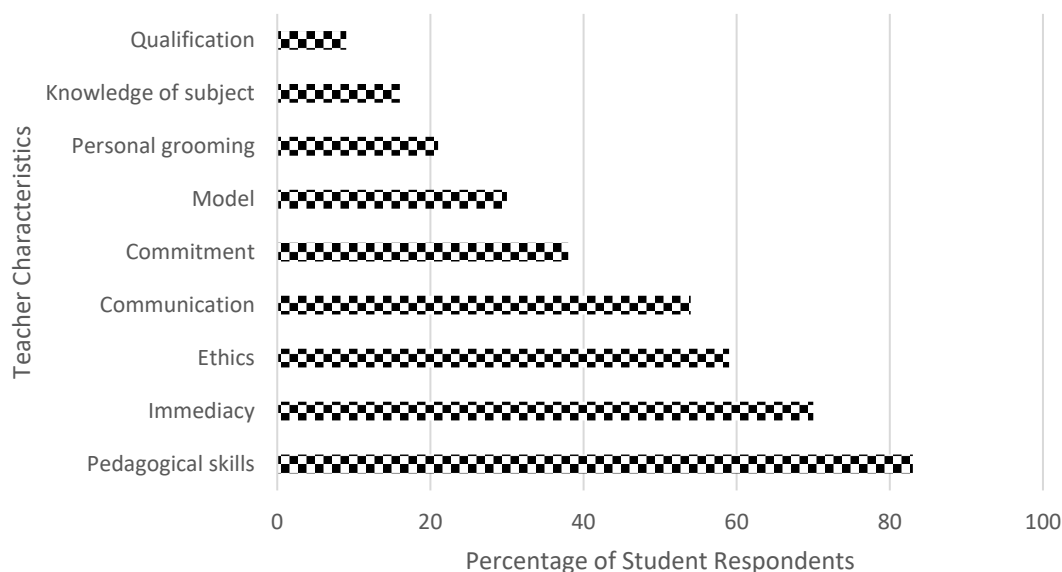


Figure 1: Students’ perception of qualities of ideal teachers of English

Therefore, to students, the teacher attributes that they valued the most were pedagogical skills (extremely important) and immediacy (very important),

Research question 2: What attributes do lecturers value most in a teacher of English?

Data analysis showed that lecturers considered a commitment to duty as a “very important” quality of an ideal teacher of English, as most of the participants (75%) referenced it in their responses. The expressions used by respondents include “commitment” (13 times), “dedication” (12 times), “faithfulness” (4 times) and “loyalty” (2 times). One of the lecturers wrote, “*The dedication of my English teacher towards the school is uppermost*”.

The next highly referenced ideal teacher characteristic was teacher immediacy. The lecturers frequently used the following expressions to typify the ideal teacher immediacy characteristics: love/loving (15 times), friendly/friendliness (12 times). The third most valued characteristics of an ideal teacher of English were the possession of pedagogical skills, ethical conduct, and knowledge of the subject matter.

Communication skills, as well as personal grooming, ranked fifth, whereas qualification ranked least. The detail is presented in Figure 2.

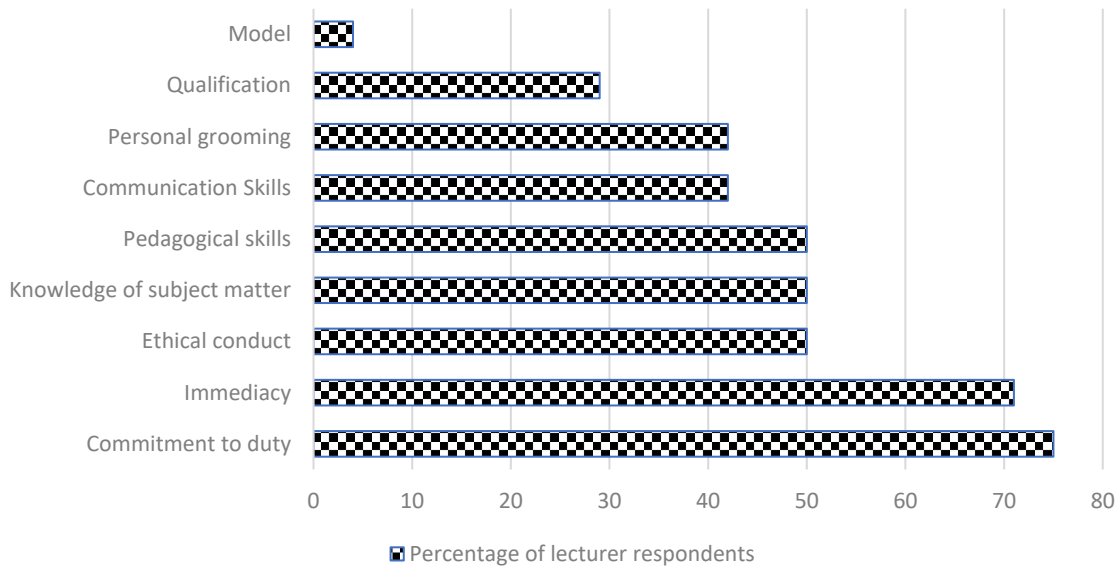


Figure 2: Lecturers' perception of the qualities of an ideal teacher of English

Therefore, the teacher attributes that lecturers valued most were teacher commitment to duty (very important) and immediacy (very important).

Research question 3: To what extent are students and lecturers similar in their perceptions of the qualities of an ideal teacher of English Language?

Based on the categories in Table 1, students considered pedagogical skill an “extremely important” quality of a teacher of English. To lecturers, commitment to duty and immediacy were “very important” qualities. But to students, immediacy was “very important”. Both lecturers and students considered communication skills and ethical conduct “fairly important”. This is presented in Figure 3.

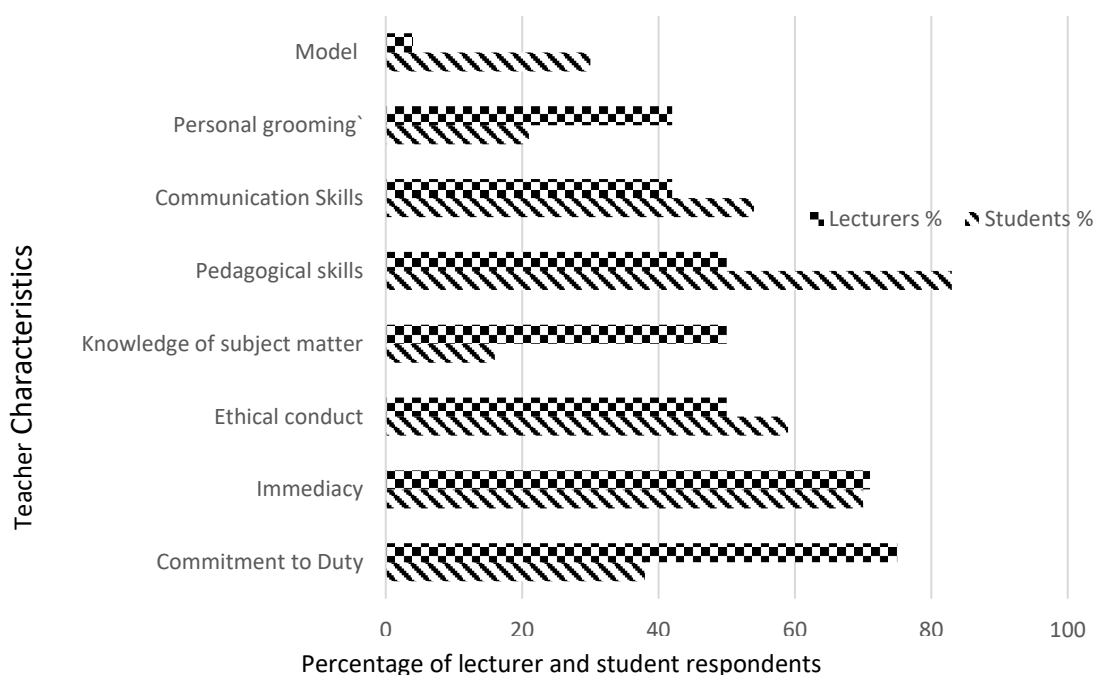


Figure 3: Comparison of students’ and lecturers’ perception of teacher characteristics

A student wrote, “A good English teacher teaches to impart knowledge. He can prepare students so they won’t be scared of exams.” Some students emphasised teacher use of questioning as an instructional strategy. They expected an ideal teacher to review past questions with them and to “answer questions with questions”. In other words, the teacher should apply the Socratic Method. But a lecturer wrote that an ideal teacher of English Language should: “...make students go along with him when teaching. He should be able to ask questions after lectures to know if the students are following.” Regarding communication skills, whereas lecturers frequently used the term communication skills, most students emphasised fluency, a term none of the lecturers used.

Students and lecturers differed significantly in three areas. First, lecturers rating of dedication to duty (commitment) was 75 per cent as opposed to a rating of 21 per cent by students. Secondly, while 50 per cent of lecturers mentioned that a teacher must have good knowledge of the subject matter, only 18 per cent of students mentioned that quality. Thirdly, whereas students (27%) mentioned that a teacher must be a role model, this quality was of minimal importance to lecturers (4%).

Therefore the point of convergent between lecturers' and students' perceptions of the attributes of an ideal teacher of English Language was in immediacy skills. Both considered immediacy skills "very important" However, they differed in how they categorised pedagogical skills. Students considered pedagogical skills as extremely important, lecturers considered it "fairly important". Also, while the possession of communication skills was "fairly important" to students, it was "marginally important" to lecturers.

Discussion of findings

The study investigated lecturers' and students' perceptions of the qualities of an ideal teacher of English Language. The researchers posed three research questions and answered them using thematic analysis, frequency counts and simple percentages. In this section, the researchers discuss the findings. The analyses of the data indicate that students expect an ideal teacher of English to have good pedagogical and immediacy skills. This finding aligns with those of Doró and Balla (2014), Al-Issa (2017), Febriyanti (2018) and Mohammaditabar et al. (2019). The reasons why most students expected teachers of English in a second-language context to have high pedagogic skills is not farfetched. English in Nigeria is often acquired formally in the school context. Therefore, learners expect that the teacher should at least have skills in teaching so that the learners can master the language. Students expect teachers to teach and do that well by deploying suitable strategies and methods that would help teachers achieve not only their lesson objectives but also the learners' expectations.

Regarding students' expectations that teachers should have high immediacy skills, this was the second most mentioned quality by students. This finding is in tandem with earlier studies (Rusu, Soitub, & Panaitcet, 2012; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011) that found that students rated relational skills as one of the highest qualities of an ideal English language teacher. This is probably because students are social beings and the English classroom is a social environment where students learn how to use English in social and other contexts. Besides, since, teachers' attitude towards students could create a friendly or hostile learning environment (Timothy & Uguma, 2017), an intimidating atmosphere could hamper students' learning of the language. Students may be afraid to use the language in class if they feel intimidated or harassed by the teacher. On the other hand, as literature has shown, teacher immediacy behaviour could predict not only affective learning but also cognitive learning (Mullane, 2014). That is perhaps, the reason many students would expect a teacher of English Language to have relational skills.

The result of the data analysis further showed that lecturers valued teacher dedication to duty above other teacher attributes. In other words, the attitude of the teachers of English towards their professional obligations was highlighted by most lecturers,

whether male or female. The lecturers, perhaps, based on their experience (the least of them had ten years teaching experience), may have observed that irrespective of the skills with which teachers are endowed, teachers without passion, commitment and dedication could depreciate the effect of their proficiency and knowledge of the subject matter. This finding supports Mart (2013) and TRCN (2010) who affirm that passion, commitment to duty and zeal hallmark an ideal professional teacher. This is probably because a zealous teacher is likely to deploy intellectual, emotional and physical resources to create optimum conditions for learning to occur. A committed teacher would be evident to both the administration and the students. It is also possible that lecturers extolled this attribute because it could have implications for their career development and advancement since school administrators, especially at the primary and secondary level could use teacher commitment to determine whether or not teachers get promoted.

An intriguing finding was that both lecturers and students rated knowledge of the subject matter as marginally important. While it may be argued that students take it for granted that teachers are knowledgeable, and perhaps found it inseparable from pedagogical skills, lecturers who themselves are teacher trainers should understand that teachers cannot teach what they do not know. But this finding found correspondence in Almazary and Al-alawneh (2020, p.13) whose participants rated teacher knowledge as “marginally important”.

A curious aspect of our finding is that in an age of digitalization, neither the lecturers nor the students mentioned teacher digital literacy and proficiency as one of the characteristics of an ideal teacher of English. The authors had expected that with students’ and lecturers’ increasing use of the social media and digital technologies (Timothy, 2018), students and lecturers would mention proficiency in the use of information and communication technologies as one of the teacher characteristics of an ideal teacher of English Language. Perhaps, this attribute was omitted because in reality in many Nigerian secondary schools, the use of digital technologies for instructional delivery is not yet the norm. Therefore, both lecturers and students might not have considered ICTs proficiency as a feasible attribute of teachers of English Language.

Concerning gender in students and lecturers’ perceptions of an ideal English language teacher, the differences were marginal. For both lecturers and students, male and female placed a premium on communication and immediacy skills. This agrees with Al-Khairi (2015) who found that students, irrespective of gender, extolled personality and professional characteristics in teachers of English.

Conclusion

The study showed that, for students, the four most important qualities expected of an ideal teacher of English were pedagogical skills, immediacy, ethical behaviour and communication skills. Whereas lecturers highly priced commitment to duty, both lecturers and students considered immediacy, ethical conduct important too.

While this was mainly a qualitative study with a small sample, and, therefore, the result might not be generalizable, the findings are significant in three ways. Firstly, they provide the authors with a documentation of the variability and similarities in the opinions of teacher trainers and pre-university students on the qualities expected of an ideal teacher of English. Secondly, the data generated could provide substance for a class discussion which could help the authors, and their preservice teachers to be self-aware and perhaps critically examine their skills and characteristics. Finally, teachers of English may wish to use the findings to reflect on their characteristics and how they could better serve their students and employers.

The authors, furthermore, intend to expand the study by using the identified teacher characteristics as the basis for designing a questionnaire to investigate how preservice as well as practising teachers of English rate those characteristics. Although the findings agree with previous studies, perhaps, a qualitative/observational study of the qualities of highly effective teachers of English Language could be undertaken. This could provide information on whether findings of studies on participants' perception would agree with findings from a researcher's observation.

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