

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS: WHAT DO EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS EXPECT?

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Abstract: Desirable characteristics of TEFL (Teacher of English as a Foreign Language) have recently presented a major concern for researchers, particularly in the realm of teacher education. However, no matter how large the number of research projects conducted in the field is, very few ever investigated the perspective of pre-service teachers. This mixed-method research was then conducted to identify characteristics of a good TEFL, as perceived by pre-service teachers. Participants were 117 students at Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE), University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University Hanoi (VNU), who were being trained to be English teachers. Self-report questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data respectively. As indicated by the results, remarkable pedagogical skills and excellent content knowledge are highly expected for TEFL. Further qualitative analysis shows that this ideal image stems from pre-service teachers' conception of TEFL' roles as transmitters of knowledge, and that teaching is considered a profession with certain sets of expertise required. Overall, the research has demonstrated FELTE pre-service teachers' expectations of teacher qualities, which to some extent, also revealed their didactic beliefs. These findings are hoped to offer implications for both student teachers and trainers working in EFL teacher education.

Keywords: teacher characteristics, TEFL, good teacher, pre-service teachers, teacher education

1. Introduction

Desirable characteristics of teachers have long been discussed by scholars, especially in the field of teacher education (Brosh, 1996). The primary reason why criteria of a good teacher attract such a great interest may stem from teachers' pivotal role in education system (Miron, 2006). Their professional effectiveness has a great impact on not only teaching but also learning efficiency. As a result, it is critical that ideal attributes

of teachers be duplicated among teacher community in an effort to improve teaching quality. Moreover, with desirable qualities of teachers being identified, teacher education colleges can better select candidates that suit the profession and prepare pre-service teachers for teaching career.

Recently in Vietnam, under the context of globalization, English has been placed in an increasingly important position in the educational system and the need for enhancing the quality of teaching this subject has become more pressing. In 2008, with the decision No 1400/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister, Vietnam's National Foreign Language 2020

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Project has been approved with the aim of improving foreign language teaching and learning for the period 2008 – 2020. Based on the assumption that teaching staff play the key role in achieving this goal, increasing the number of qualified teachers has been a central focus of the project. As part of the 2020 project, a detailed description of professional competencies for in-service TEFL, known as English Teacher Competence Framework (ETCF) has been issued by the Ministry of Education and Training. The framework is assumed to act as a useful guideline for foreign language teacher education institutions in developing teacher training projects. In fact, this attempt of providing a framework of teacher competences is basically to answer the question: What do we expect of a teacher? What are desirable characteristics of a foreign language teacher?

Regarding research conducted in this field, most of them focus on the perception of teachers and students towards the ideal traits of TEFL (Brosh, 1996; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, Al-Siyabi, & Al-Maamari, 2015; Zamani, & Ahangari, 2016; Hung, 2017). Little attention, however, has been paid to pre-service teachers, the main subject of teacher development process. In other words, their voice in the field seems to be neglected, even though the exploration of pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs, as suggested by Bullough and Baughman (1997, as cited in Le, 2013), should be the start of any teacher education program. Alterations to the behaviors of prospective teachers can only be made based on the cognizance of their prevailing perceptions and underlying assumptions.

The aim of the researcher, consequently, is to uncover pre-service teachers' present beliefs about teaching profession, the role of TEFL, and their expectations as future teachers. The fulfillment of this purpose is hoped to be reflected through an investigation into one of the most noticeable matters in teacher education, characteristics of a good teacher. By

examining pre-service teachers' expectations of a good TEFL, the researcher expects to fill in the research gap and help improve English Teacher Education in Vietnam. Following is the question that guides the research: *What are desirable characteristics of a TEFL, as perceived by pre-service teachers in FELTE, ULIS?*

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies worldwide have tried to decipher the distinctive traits of TEFL. Most of them investigate the matter from the angle of students, practicing teachers and pre-service teachers.

Characteristics of a good TEFL as perceived by students

Park and Lee (2006), in a study carried out in Korea, investigated the perceptions of high school students about an effective English teacher. Among three categories describing qualities of TEFL, pedagogical knowledge was rated remarkably higher than English proficiency and socio-affective skills (the ability to create relationship with students).

Also exploring the same topic, Chen and Lin (2009), surprisingly, did not confirm what was found by Park and Lee (2006). In fact, it was indicated that Chinese high school pupils favored teacher's personality and teacher-student relationship rather than instructional competence. Being enthusiastic, friendly, open-minded, respectful and caring about students were the most important characteristics of a good teacher.

Unlike the above-mentioned studies, which employed questionnaires as the single tool of research, Tran (2015) examined Vietnamese students' perceptions of an effective TEFL using both interviews and a questionnaire. Accordingly, English competence, teaching ability and socio-

affective skills were mentioned as the most important qualities of English teachers respectively. In addition, teachers' knowledge of Western and Vietnamese cultures, their application of technology in teaching and professional behaviors in class were expected as well.

As can be seen, some attempts have been made to determine featured qualities of eminent TEFLs; nonetheless, much of the research to date has been descriptive in nature and revealed a wide divergence in findings.

Characteristics of a good TEFL as perceived by teachers

The opinion of foreign language teachers as to attributes of effective professionals was first reported by Brosh (1996). Accordingly, FL teachers accentuate the importance of subject knowledge, teaching skills and behaviors towards students. In terms of the knowledge, teachers should showcase proficiency in the target language, ideally when compared with native speakers. Also, they are regarded "representatives" of the target language community (p. 132). With respect to the instructional skills, effective FL teachers are supposed to excel at organizing, explaining, and sparking interest among learners. Last but not least, they should treat students fairly and be available for assistance. However, the findings might have been far more useful if the author had categorized characteristics systematically.

The work of Mullock (2003) improved this weakness when he categorised the characteristics of TEFL as perceived by novice and experienced TESOL teachers into five qualities. Firstly, *pedagogical content knowledge and skills* mention the ability to transform content knowledge to learners in a captivating and comprehensible way. Secondly, *attitudes and behaviors towards students* are interpreted as "developing a personal and working relationship with students to maximize student learning, showing empathy"

(p. 12). *Teacher's personal characteristics and attitudes* refer to such characteristics as sense of humor, open mind, responsibility, and enthusiasm about teaching. Fourthly important, *content knowledge* includes the mastery of subject matter, target language culture, and near-native English proficiency. Lastly, a good English teacher with *broader educational goals and skills* "helps students form a good personality, provides a good moral example, opens students' eyes to the outside world, stretches and challenges students, doesn't emphasize exam results" (p. 13). These results support the idea of prior research that content knowledge, teaching skills and teachers' behaviors constitute an expert teacher. Moreover, personalities and broader educational goals are complemented. Interestingly, this cross-culture study also reveals that cultural origin may be embedded in EFL teachers' beliefs and Vietnamese teachers highly valued teachers as moral guides.

The study of Mullock (2003) has provided a comprehensive frame to evaluate TEFLs based on five categories, which regards teachers not only as professionals but also as human beings with personal characteristics. It has laid the foundation for the questionnaire design of this paper.

Characteristics of a good TEFL as perceived by pre-service teachers

Among a number of scholars inspecting qualities of effective TEFL, Borg (2006) may be one of the rare researchers examine this area from the standpoint of pre-service teachers. Among five groups of participants in his project, the last two are prospective teachers of English from Hungary and Slovenia. The findings from these groups unearth distinctive characteristics of TEFL as specified: using a wide range of teaching methods; being knowledgeable about language, culture, and general topics in life; exercising "communication-related skills"; remaining up-to-date with the language; forging a close, relaxing and positive

relationship with students; explaining things in the foreign language understandably; and possessing unique personalities (creative, humorous, flexible, “actor” type, motivating, enthusiastic, communicate freely and radiate positive feeling) (pp. 20-23). Notwithstanding the valuable findings this study may contribute to the current research, an obvious shortcoming is that pre-service teachers are not the main focus of this work, not to mention the limited qualitative data given to clarify those results.

Apparently, the exploration of literature review has exhibited an urgent need for research body associated with EFL pre-service teacher’s perceptions of teacher qualities. The researcher was encouraged to further scrutinize this matter as a consequence.

3. Methodology

Research design

Explanatory Sequential Strategy, as a typical type of mix method design, was chosen for this research. The whole procedure consisted of two separate interactive stages, with the qualitative data collection built directly on the quantitative results (Creswell, 2014). Using in-depth qualitative data to interpret significant and unexpected findings from the quantitative phase, the design was expected to provide the

researcher with a satisfying explanation for participants’ responses.

Participants and Sampling

The population of this research was third year and fourth year students from FELTE, ULIS, VNU. Since these students were being trained to be future EFL teachers, they could be treated as pre-service teachers. Moreover, unlike freshmen and sophomores who merely attended classes of General Elective Subjects, third year and fourth years students were supposed to take directly major-related subjects, and have largely hands-on experience. This would potentially provide them with broader pedagogical knowledge and a stronger sense of teacher identity.

For the quantitative stage, the selection of participants was based on the principle of cluster sampling. Initially, each class of 14E1, 14E2, 14E3, 14E4, 14E5, 14E6, 14E7, 14E8, 15E1, 15E2, 15E3, 15E4, 15E5, 15E6, 15E7, 15E8, 15E9 in FELTE, ULIS was numbered. For the next step, the researcher utilized the website random.org to randomly choose 10 classes, whose students were invited as participants of the research.

For the qualitative stage, participants were purposefully selected based on results of the first phase analysis. Significant and unexpected findings were summarised in the following table:

Table 1. Significant and unexpected quantitative findings

Significant findings	Finding 1 (Quality 1; ranked the 2nd highest) Finding 2 (Quality 2; ranked the highest) Finding 3 (Quality 4; ranked the lowest)
Unexpected findings	Finding 4 (Characteristic 11; mean score <4) Finding 5 (Characteristic 12; mean score <4) Finding 6 (Characteristic 23; mean score <4) Finding 7 (Characteristic 28; mean score <4) Finding 8 (Characteristic 32; mean score <4)

To obtain qualified candidates for the interview, the researcher utilized criterion-based sampling strategy, which, as stated by Creswell (2007, as cited in Turner, 2010), could increase the chances of gaining credible information. Accordingly, participants whose

responses match all of the predetermined criteria would be listed as desirable interviewees. In this case, 5 participants selected were the ones with answers in the questionnaire satisfying all of the selection criteria:

Table 2. Interviewee selection criteria

Criterion	Description
1	Rank quality 1 as the second most important (match finding 1)
2	Rank quality 2 as the most important (match finding 2)
3	Rank quality 4 as the least important (match finding 3)
4	Rank characteristics 11, 12, 23, 28, 32 as not important (match finding 4 to finding 8)

Data collection

Instrument

Self-report questionnaire and semi-structured interview were respectively employed as the tools for data collection in quantitative and qualitative phases.

Procedure

Quantitative phase

Firstly, the questionnaire was developed by the researcher with extensive reference to the study of Park and Lee (2006) and Mullock (2003). To increase the reliability of questionnaire, the researcher consulted an expert for comments about items in the first draft. After that, it was revised to the second draft before being delivered to 6 students of class 14E1 for piloting purpose. Based on the mentor's feedback and 14E1 students' responses, a final version of the questionnaire was produced. For the next step, questionnaires were delivered to participants via both online and offline channels, depending on the accessibility to participant groups. 117 questionnaires with responses were returned.

Qualitative phase

Unpredictable findings revealed by participants' answers motivated the

researcher to carry out further exploration via semi-structured interviews. Initially, an interview question list was designed based on questionnaire analysis. Next, the researcher contacted 5 participants for the interview. Paper notes, pens, a list of questions, participants' questionnaire, and an electronic recorder were prepared before the interview. The researcher conducted the interviews in 7 steps as suggested by McNamara (2009, as cited in Turner, 2010, p. 757): "(1) choose a setting with little distraction; (2) explain the purpose of the interview, (3) address terms of confidentiality, (4) explain the format of the interview, (5) indicate how long the interview usually takes, (6) tell the interviewees how to get in touch with the interviewer later if they want to, and (7) ask if the interviewee had any question before the interview".

Data analysis

Instrument

Statistical approach was adopted to measure the central tendency of answers. The mean score for each item was calculated. To deal with the data collected from interviews, content analysis was exploited. The dense amount of spoken data was organized into codes so that it could further explain the quantitative findings.

Procedure

Regarding the data from questionnaire, the researcher carefully examined all the questionnaires to guarantee that they were valid and understandable. Then, the number of responses for each item in the questionnaire was counted. These figures were subsequently imported into Excel file and illustrated as tables and charts for preliminary analysis. Concerning the qualitative data, all interviews were converted into text form before data was categorized into codes corresponding with the 8 findings listed in table 1. The information was then used to elucidate the results from quantitative stage.

4. Results and Discussion

Characteristics of a good TEFL as perceived by pre-service teachers

A ranking question was used to evaluate teacher qualities in order of importance. Following is the chart demonstrating the preferences of student teachers in 5 categories: (1) Subject content knowledge, (2) Pedagogical knowledge and skills, (3) Behaviors and attitudes towards students, (4) Personal characteristics and attitudes, and finally, (5) Broader educational goals and skills.

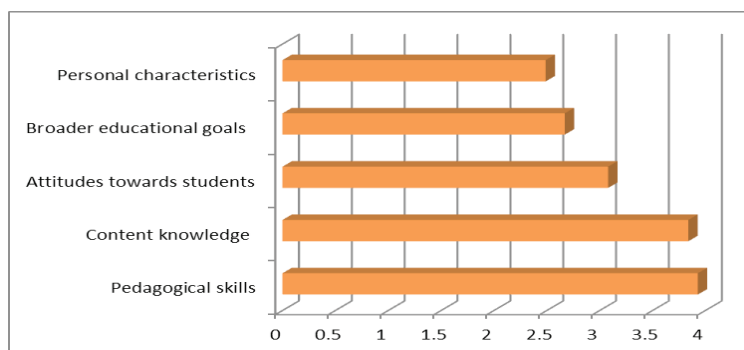


Figure 1. The importance of teacher qualities as ranked by pre-service teachers

As shown in Figure 1, the two most expected qualities of a TEFL are Pedagogical skills and Content knowledge, which have the mean score of 3.93 and 3.83 respectively. The quality with the lowest score (2.49), Personality, implies the fact that teacher’s personal characteristic is the least significant element. Taking the third and the fourth positions are Attitudes towards students (3.08) and Broader educational goals (2.67).

Although this finding does not support the result in Mullock (2003), it corroborates the ideas of Tran (2015), who suggests that English competence, teaching skills and socio-affective skills are the most referred features when it comes to an ideal Vietnamese teacher of English. The finding is also in agreement

with the conclusion of Hung (2017), as secondary school English teacher in Hanoi are found to emphasize the importance of subject knowledge and teaching methodologies to a good teacher. Reasons for the choices of pre-service teachers will be elaborately discussed in the next parts, after the qualitative data is analyzed.

Content knowledge – a prerequisite of a good TEFL

Table 3. Mean score for characteristics of a good TEFL in terms of content knowledge

Category	Characteristics	Mean score
Content knowledge	1. understands spoken English well	4.46
	2. reads English well	4.49
	3. writes English well	4.48
	4. speaks English well	4.56
	5. is knowledgeable of English subject matter	4.30
	6. is aware of English-speaking countries' culture	4.07

Six items on the questionnaire measures the extent to which Content knowledge contributes to the formation of a good TEFL. All items receive over 4 out of 5 in mean score, reporting a highly positive evaluation. Particularly, the strong preference for speaking and reading competence reported in the current research is consistent with the findings of Park and Lee (2006), who discovered that these two skills were the highest rated out of 8 items in English proficiency category.

The strong endorsement of Subject knowledge in general can be justified by the fact that participants regard TEF as preliminarily a language transmitter. According to an interviewee, to accomplish their role as teachers, it is indispensable that they be good at what they teach. Also by this participant, the core value of a teacher is to transmit the knowledge; thus, the teacher should have such a good command of knowledge that they can convey it to the learners correctly (Interviewee 5, personal communication, April 3, 2018). In another interview, the participant adopted the standpoint that teachers are knowledge providers. Moreover, they should be available to deal with students' questions regarding

linguistic knowledge; therefore, Subject content knowledge is regarded essential to a TEFL (Interviewee 4, April 3, 2018).

To recap, what student teachers emphasize in the role of a TEFL is the ability to communicate effectively in English, which can be explained by their considering TEFL as a transmitter of knowledge.

Pedagogical skills - the most desirable EFL teacher qualities

From the perspective of FELTE students, teaching skill is the most predominant aspect of a TEFL. The majority of characteristics belonging to this category are ranked very high by the participants. 4 out of 5 interviewees take the view that teachers are the knowledge conveyors; therefore, they should possess successful instructional skills to transmit the knowledge comprehensibly and interestingly to students.

With the hope of making comparison between the significance of specific pedagogical skills in constituting an expert teacher, the researcher used a simple statistical analysis. The results obtained through the quantitative stage are presented in Table 4 as below.

Table 4. Mean score for characteristics of a good TEFL in terms of pedagogical skills

Category	Characteristics	Mean score
Pedagogical knowledge and skills	7. prepares the lesson well	4.44
	8. gives clear instruction	4.61
	9. adjusts English input to match students' proficiency level	4.68
	10. varies teaching methods to suit different learning styles	4.42

Category	Characteristics	Mean score
	11. applies Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in teaching	3.68
	12. practices a learner-centered approach	3.88
	13. employs classroom management skills effectively	4.27
	14. involves students in various activities (group/pair work, drama, role-play, ...)	4.11
	15. conducts valid assessment	4.38
	16. gives useful feedback for learning improvement	4.65
	17. caters for learners' needs	4.17

From the table above, among all the teaching sub-skills, adjusting language inputs to suit students well, giving constructive feedback and clear instructions are the three most favored features. In fact, these findings can be anticipated with reference to Borg (2003), who implies that unexpected behaviors of students in class (e.g., non-comprehension) foster a prevalent belief among pre-service teachers that they should assure students' understanding by managing language instructions. However, the most striking result to emerge from the data is student teachers' neutral attitude towards the manipulation of ICT and learner-centered approach.

Regarding the incorporation of ICT, it has been pre-assumed to bring many advantages to the 21st century foreign language education. Furthermore, *ICT in teaching and learning English* is also a compulsory subject covered in the curriculum of Teacher Education Program in ULIS. Therefore, it seems surprising to the researcher when this skill is not fully appreciated by the student teachers. The data collated from in-person interviews has revealed some underlying roots for their option. The primary reason is that student teachers do not strongly believe in the clear-cut benefits of ICT. 2 out of 4 participants reported that although their previous language teachers did not employ ICT in teaching, those teachers could complete their tasks. In addition, since the participants did not have much exposure to an ICT-oriented environment as learners of

language, it might be challenging for them to evaluate the effectiveness of its application. The secondary cause for the low rank is that pre-service teachers have difficulties integrating ICT in their classroom. As claimed by an interviewee, the usage of ICT is time-consuming and interrupting, especially in the case of malfunction. Consequently, the pressure of using ICT frequently might impose a "burden" to this teacher (Interviewee 1, April 3, 2018).

Learner-centered approach can be considered a distinctive trait of modern English language teaching. As a result, that not many participants show strong advocacy for this method presents a demand for further investigation. The qualitative data shows that the unpopularity of learner-centered methodology in Vietnam context may explain for student teachers' unawareness of this approach. As stated by interviewee 2, but for her studying about the benefits of learner-centered teaching at college, she would have never been familiar with it. The inactivity of Vietnamese students may be another reason as well. According to interviewee 3, it was fairly hard for the teacher to deploy this methodology in reality when students prefer the passive way of learning, for example, learning by heart all the language structures (interviewee 3, April 3, 2018).

In short, the three most necessary pedagogical skills of a TEFL as perceived by FELTE students are: teaching based on students' ability, giving helpful comments

and instructing clearly. On the other hand, the exploitation of ICT and learner-centered approach are less required when taking into account the participants' experience as a learner and as a teacher in the context of Vietnam.

Behaviors towards students – creating working and personal relationships

Table 5. Mean score for the characteristics of a good TEFL in terms of attitudes and behaviors towards students

Category	Characteristics	Mean score
Attitudes and behaviors towards students	18. is available to help students	4.07
	19. shows respect to students	4.48
	20. encourages students' self-confidence in learning English	4.47
	21. treats students fairly	4.43
	22. arouses students' motivation for learning English	4.48
	23. takes a personal interest in each student (e.g. remembering name, strength and weakness of each student)	3.84

As can be seen from data in Table 5, showing respect to learners and strengthening their learning motivation are considerably preferable to other characteristics (both get 4.48 in mean score). This finding supports previous research when decent teaching is supposed to rely on the respect paid to students (Chen & Lin, 2009; Qureshi, 2013) and motivation is argued to play a critical role in second language acquisition (Dornyei, 1998, as cited in Park & Lee, 2006).

Surprisingly, caring for individual learner does not receive a high score. Nevertheless, the reason is not because the participants consider it unimportant; instead, they think it depends on the teaching situation. Specifically, only when the class size is small (under 15 students) can the teacher manage to take care of every single student. In other cases, personal care should be restricted to weak students only (interviewee 4, personal communication, Apr 3, 2018).

To conclude, whereas being inspiring and respectful to students are labeled essential characteristics, catering for individual learner's need is supposed to be heavily dependent on

Characteristics associated with the attitudes and behaviors of English teachers towards students are ranked thirdly important by the participants. The following table summarizes these features with their mean scores.

the number of students in classroom.

Personality - a bonus point for a teacher of English

Based on the responses of participants, personal characteristics and attitudes are found to be the most insignificant element of a TEFL. In-depth interviews indicate that participants may regard the quality merely a "bonus" other than a key to impressive teaching (interviewee 4 & interviewee 5, personal communication, Apr 3, 2018). According to an answer, becoming a good teacher relies considerably on training process rather than innate personalities, which accords with the statement of Reynolds (1995, as cited in Brosh, 1996) that teaching is "a job that can be learned; one need not be 'born' a teacher in order to teach effectively" (p. 200). Because most of the interviewees hold the firm belief that a teacher is principally accountable for knowledge delivery, what they teach is more important than what kind of people they are. To better compare the necessity of different personalities to an excellent TEFL, detailed results gained from the analysis are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Mean score for characteristics of a good EFL teacher in terms of personal characteristics and attitudes

Category	Characteristics	Mean score
Personal characteristics and attitudes	24. caring	3.98
	25. friendly	4.00
	26. patient	4.27
	27. enthusiastic	4.25
	28. humorous	3.76
	29. creative	4.17
	30. open-minded	4.38
	31. behaves professionally (be punctual, well-dressed, ...)	4.20

The most significant finding from the data above is that prospective teachers in ULIS highly appreciate an open-minded TEFL (4.38) while paying little attention to his/her sense of humor (3.76).

In fact, keeping an open-minded attitude has been agreed by myriad researchers as a typical trait of good teachers (Mullock, 2003; Chen & Lin, 2009; Qureshi, 2013); therefore, it came as no surprise that participants favored this characteristic. However, it is surprising that a sense of humor is not enthusiastically endorsed by them. As detected from the qualitative data, a humorous teacher is positively welcomed owing to the capability to establish a comfortable and relaxing learning atmosphere. Nevertheless, since not everyone is lucky enough to possess this feature, labeling it an obligatory quality seems unfair. 3 out of 5 students conceded that they were not humorous people; however, they could still satisfactorily perform their role as EFL teachers. Besides, one participant

substantiated her perception with the experience that teachers’ jokes in the past did not appeal to her as a learner (interviewee 2, personal communication, April 3, 2018).

In conclusion, third year and fourth year students in FELTE, ULIS may consider personal features a bonus rather than fundamental requirement for a TEFL. Among all the given personal traits, being open-minded is specially favored whilst having a good sense of humor is not of pivotal importance. Explanation for this result can be referred to the participants’ own personal characteristics in addition to their school experiences.

Broader educational goals – Is it the main responsibility of a teacher?

Broader educational goal is one of the two categories that are ranked the lowest as contributing factors to a good TEFL. The following table helps specify the extent to which each characteristic in this category is rated.

Table 7. Mean score for characteristics of a good EFL teacher in terms of the broader educational goals and skills

Category	Characteristics	Mean score
Broader educational goals and skills	32. provides a good moral example	3.92
	33. helps students form a good personality	4.02
	34. opens students’ eyes to the outside world	4.18
	35. inspires students to learn	4.42
	36. helps students become independent learners	4.32

The figure shows that the preference for items in this group of characteristics is widely dispersed. Some goals are classified as very important (inspires students to learn, helps students become independent learners), some, on the other hand, are not that positively evaluated (provides a good moral example, helps students form a good personality).

Concerning the educational goals in which teachers are expected to inspire their students, the same trend has been evident in the findings of Mullock (2003) and Al-Khairi (2015). However, when it comes to the ethic role of teachers, a poignant finding to note is the contradiction between the current and the previous studies. Mullock (2003, p.16) mentions “providing a good moral example” as predominant traits reflected by Asian TESOL teachers, whereas Phan (2008) highlights the central role of being moral educators among Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English. The finding in this research, however, illustrates a reverse trend when this characteristic receives a relatively low score (3.92) compared to other traits. In an effort to expound this unanticipated result, qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews is interpreted.

Most of the interviewees agree that Vietnamese culture favors teachers as moral guides, which means that they are expected to behave in certain ways. Nonetheless, there are several possible explanations why student teachers in FELTE, ULIS adopt an impartial attitude towards the role of teachers as moral role models. Firstly, participants believe that teaching is an ordinary occupation; therefore, teachers should be entitled to comprehensive freedom doing what they want instead of being confined to a social norm: “[...] *like, all people think they have to be like this, like that. Teacher is just a job, right? just*

like doctor, just like other occupations, so I think they can have the freedom to do what they want” (Interviewee 3, personal communication, Apr 3, 2018). As argued by these respondents, provided that teachers exhibit professionalism in teaching English, their behaviors outside the class hardly matter. Secondly, it may act as a “burden” to teachers if they are commanded to perform morally perfect. While Interviewee 1 complained that she could not handle the responsibility of a moral guide besides a facilitator of learning, Interviewee 4 attributed her idea to the humble payment of modern teachers: “*Considering the payment that they - teachers are getting nowadays, I just feel that we are requiring too much from teachers”* (Interviewee 4, April 3, 2018). For the last opinion identified through the interviews, whether being a good moral example is necessary or not depends profoundly on the target students. Specifically, only when students are younger learners had teachers better set an example for them to follow (Interviewee 5, April 3, 2018).

To summarize, pre-service teachers in ULIS value a TEFL who gives students inspiration. On the contrary, exhibiting exemplary character and establishing a code of ethics for learners are considered unnecessary. This may result from their sense of “overwhelming professional responsibilities”, “the low pay”, “the vision of being perfect” and their personal ideas of teachers’ role (Le, 2013, p. 185).

The above findings, to some extent, have reflected a holistic view of ULIS pre-service teachers’ perception of teaching profession and the role of EFL teachers. Accordingly, participants chiefly consider teaching an occupation that requires teachers to possess certain knowledge and skills to fulfill the job. To their mind, teachers emerge as masters who

are able to transmit knowledge to students in a comprehensible and fascinating manner.

It is also notable that pre-service teachers are found to develop these conceptions through a negotiation between different aspects. Firstly, they construct the image of a good teacher by taking into account what kind of teachers they want to become and what kind of teachers they are able to become. This finding supports the hypothesis of Bandura (2001) in which the mediation between individual performance capacity and personal standards directs human agency. Besides, the widely varied teaching beliefs could be explained by a host of roles that student teachers assume at the same time: teacher of English, language learner, Vietnamese teacher, unique individual, member in a professional community, and a prospective teacher. The permeation among these positions makes the conceptions of juniors and seniors in FELTE, ULIS complicated, and unique.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study portray the ideal figure of good EFL teachers from the perspective of pre-service teachers. They are competent in English and showcase exceptional pedagogical skills (adjusting instruction to students' level, delivering clear explanation and giving constructive feedback). They are also inspiring teachers who can motivate students to study and help them become independent learners. Besides, strongly desirable are teachers who are open-minded and respectful to students. Less required characteristics for them encompass implementing ICT and learner-centered approach, taking care of individual students, setting an exemplary image, and being humorous. In general, whilst subject content expertise and teaching skills are particularly valued, personal characteristics are regarded the least important and dependent on teacher's styles.

From these findings, useful implications could be drawn for both students of education and teacher educators. For student teachers,

desirable characteristics of teachers may serve as a source of reference during their teacher identity development. Based on the findings in this research, student teachers may have a clearer vision of the teacher figure they desire to build up in the future, and try to equip themselves with essential knowledge, skills and attitudes. Additional implications are for teacher educators in FELTE, ULIS. In general, results found in this paper indicate that the knowledge base related to English subject and pedagogy provided in FELTE is a good starting point on the way to foster effective teachers. However, it seems that learner-centered method, ICT incorporation and ethic roles of teachers should be of increased focus in forthcoming courses. Moreover, since pre-service teachers in FELTE, ULIS perceive the concept of a good TEFL from a number of roles, it is recommended that any movement in teacher education should consider their multiple experience and pre-existing beliefs to produce a far-reaching effect on their teaching perceptions.

This present study is by no means comprehensive and a number of caveats need to be noted. Firstly, there exists a lack of consistence within the sampling when participants were not of the same grade. As a result of discrepancies in experience, disparities in their teaching beliefs can be expected. In addition, due to the constrained scope of this study, the researcher was not able to provide reasonable explanations for all of the results. The data collected from interviews may be a reliable source of interpretation; however, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be generalisable. Last but not least, since the research is only carried out in the context of FELTE, ULIS, VNU, the findings are not representative for the perceptions of pre-service teachers in Vietnam. Therefore, further research is suggested to make comparison between the opinions of different groups of student teachers. Researchers are

also encouraged to inspect the perspective of EFL student teachers in other contexts outside FELTE, ULIS so that a more holistic view on Vietnamese pre-service teacher's ideal figure can be drawn.

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PHẨM CHẤT NHÀ GIÁO: SINH VIÊN SƯ PHẠM TIẾNG ANH KỶ VỌNG ĐIỀU GÌ?

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Tóm tắt: Phẩm chất của giáo viên tiếng Anh (GVTA) gần đây đã trở thành một mối quan tâm lớn đối với các nhà nghiên cứu, đặc biệt trong lĩnh vực đào tạo giáo viên. Tuy vậy, rất ít nghiên cứu phản ánh quan điểm của giáo sinh về vấn đề này. Bằng việc kết hợp phương pháp định lượng và định tính, nghiên cứu này được tiến hành nhằm xác định các phẩm chất của một GVTA giỏi, từ góc nhìn của sinh viên sư phạm tiếng Anh. Để thu thập dữ liệu định lượng, tác giả sử dụng bảng hỏi điều tra đối với 117 sinh viên chuyên ngành sư phạm tiếng Anh, trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội. Theo kết quả thu được, kỹ năng giảng dạy và kiến thức môn học được cho là những yếu tố quan trọng nhất đối với GVTA. Phân tích từ phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc cho thấy quan điểm này bắt nguồn từ việc sinh viên sư phạm tin rằng giáo viên là người truyền thụ kiến thức, và dạy học được coi là một nghề nghiệp với một số chuyên môn nhất định cần có. Thông qua việc nhận diện những đặc điểm mong muốn ở một người GVTA từ góc nhìn của giáo sinh, nghiên cứu này, ở một mức độ nào đó, đã phản ánh những tín hiệu điều sư phạm của họ. Những phát hiện trong nghiên cứu được kỳ vọng sẽ có ý nghĩa đối với cả sinh viên sư phạm và các nhà thiết kế chương trình, những người đang học tập và làm việc trong ngành sư phạm tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: phẩm chất của giáo viên, GVTA, giáo viên giỏi, giáo sinh, sư phạm tiếng Anh

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Your view on a good EFL teacher

Question 1: Rank the following qualities of an EFL teacher in order of importance from 1 to 5. Please write one number in front of each quality.

1 = the LEAST important

5 = the MOST important

- Content knowledge (English proficiency, knowledge of subject matter, knowledge of English culture)
- Pedagogical content knowledge and skills (ability to transform content knowledge to learners)
- Attitudes and behaviors towards students (ability to develop a personal and working relationship with students)
- Teachers' personal characteristics and attitudes (ex. sense of humor, enthusiasm, ...)
- Broader educational goals and skills (ability to provide a good moral example, help students)

form a good personality, open students' eyes to the outside world, ...)

If you think that other qualities are also important to an EFL teacher, please list them here:

.....

.....

.....

Question 2: Please indicate your level of agreement with these statements by ticking (x) in one box of each row.

TD = Totally disagree

A = Agree

D = Disagree

TA = Totally agree

N = Neutral

Qualities	A good EFL teacher is someone who ...	TD	D	N	A	TA
Content knowledge	1 understands spoken English well					
	2 reads English well					
	3 writes English well					
	4 speaks English well					
	5 is knowledgeable of English subject matter					
	6 is aware of English-speaking countries' culture					
Pedagogical knowledge and skills	7 prepares the lesson well					
	8 gives clear instruction					
	9 adjusts English input to match students' proficiency level					
	10 varies teaching methods to suit different learning styles					
	11 applies ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) in teaching					
	12 practices a learner-centered approach					
	13 employs classroom management skills effectively					
	14 involves students in various activities (group/pair work, drama, role-play, ...)					
	15 conducts valid assessment					
	16 gives useful feedback for learning improvement					
Attitudes and behaviors towards students	17 caters for learners' needs					
	18 is available to help students					
	19 shows respect to students					
	20 encourages students' self-confidence in learning English					
	21 treats students fairly					
	22 arouses students' motivation for learning English					
	23 takes a personal interest in each student (ex. remembering name, strength and weakness of each student)					

Personal characteristics and attitudes	24 is caring						
	25 is friendly						
	26 is patient						
	27 is enthusiastic						
	28 is humorous						
	29 is creative						
	30 is open-minded						
	31 behaves professionally (be punctual, well-dressed, ...)						
Broader educational goals and skills	32 provides a good moral example						
	33 helps students form a good personality						
	34 opens students' eyes to the outside world						
	35 inspires students to learn						
	36 helps students become independent learners						

B. Your personal information

Your name:

Your class:

Your phone number:

Your email address:

THANK YOU

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. You are learning to be a teacher of English. What motivation leads to this choice?
2. According to your answer in the questionnaire, pedagogical knowledge and skill is the most important quality of a teacher of English. Why do you think so?
3. What do you think about the importance of personal characteristics to an EFL teacher?
4. What do you think about the use of ICT in teaching English?
5. What do you think about the importance of learner-centered approach in teaching English?
6. According to your answer in the questionnaire, taking a personal interest in each student is not really necessary to an EFL teacher. Can you explain in more detail?
7. What do you think about a teacher who is humorous?
8. In traditional Vietnamese culture, teachers are often considered a moral example. What is your opinion about this social norm?