The Effective EFL University Professor: an insight into the literature

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Abstract

Defining effective EFL teachers has been a constant task for researchers and experts. In this context, many studies have been conducted in order to understand and diminish some problems that students and professors face in the teaching-learning process, even more so when we refer to teaching a foreign language. This study aims to identify the main effective EFL teacher traits from students' perspectives based on the existing literature from the last seven years. The research method used was the documentary analysis, and the academic search engines used were Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Academia. In addition, some keyword search formulas were used, such as *effective EFL teacher*, *teacher effectiveness*, *teacher characteristics*, and *students' perceptions*. Therefore, ten review articles have been analyzed. They are from the last seven years, and six are from the previous two years. These studies were focused on university level only. The features exposed in the studies showed that an effective EFL university teacher combines five dimensions (Subject matter knowledge, Pedagogical knowledge, Organization and communication skills, Socio-affective skills, and Teachers' appearance). However, only three were the most relevant (Subject matter knowledge, Pedagogical knowledge, Socio-affective skills), so an effective EFL university teacher should combine those three main traits.

Keywords: effective teacher, EFL teacher, socio-affective skill, teaching effectiveness, university teacher

Résumé

Définir des enseignants du ALE (anglais comme langue étrangère) efficaces a été une tâche constante pour les chercheurs et les experts. Dans ce contexte, de nombreuses études ont été menées afin de comprendre et d'atténuer certains problèmes auxquels les étudiants et les professeurs sont confrontés dans le processus d'enseignement-apprentissage, encore plus lorsqu'il s'agit de l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère. Cette étude vise à déterminer les caractéristiques prédominantes de l'enseignant du ALE efficace du point de vue des étudiants universitaires. La méthode de recherche utilisée a été l'analyse documentaire, et ces différents moteurs académiques, Google Scholar, DOAJ, et Academia, ont également été utilisés. En outre, certaines formules de recherche par mots-clés ont été utilisées, telles que « effective EFL teacher », « teacher effectiveness », « teacher characteristics », et « students' perceptions ». Ainsi, dix articles scientifiques ont été analysés ; elles datent des sept dernières années, dont six des deux années précédentes. Ces études portaient uniquement sur les universités. Les caractéristiques exposées dans les études ont montré qu'un enseignant universitaire du ALE efficace combine cinq dimensions (connaissance de la matière, connaissances pédagogiques, compétences d'organisation et de communication, compétences socio-affectives et apparence des enseignants). Cependant, seuls trois étaient les plus pertinents (connaissance de la matière, connaissances pédagogiques, compétences socio-affectives), donc un enseignant universitaire du ALE efficace devrait combiner ces trois traits principaux.

Mots-clés : professeur efficace, professeur ALE, compétence socio-affective, efficacité pédagogique, professeur universitaire

Introduction

Qualified and effective professors are important human resources in tertiary educational systems. They are part of the human resources that contribute to their efficient work and enhance the quality of the teaching-learning process. Researchers and experts support this statement and insist that university professors have a vital role in their students' academic achievement or failure (Rockoff, 2004). Markley (2004) points out that the actions that a university professor does or does not do in the classroom acquire a leading role in the teaching-learning process of his students; in other words, effective and efficient learning is directly influenced by what the teacher does in the classroom. Likewise, these high-quality professors are those who prove innumerable skills and do their best to maximize student performance in class (Akram, 2019). In this context, English as a Foreign Language Teachers (EFL) is not an exception to this important role in effective language teaching-learning. Therefore, universities need to recognize and hire effective teachers to guarantee quality teaching and; consequently, offer students a quality education.

Before outlining the characteristics of an effective EFL teacher, it is essential to analyze what effectiveness is. The concept of "effectiveness" is interpreted and perceived differently by different researchers in various fields of knowledge. However, a common denominator covers these multiple perceptions of effectiveness, which is that it means "the ability to be successful and produce the intended results" (Cambridge University Press, 2009). Consequently, it could be said that an effective student is related to an effective teacher (Moreno-Rubio, 2009). Thus, since it is complex to define effectiveness unanimously, it is even more complex to determine an effective EFL teacher uniquely and definitively.

In this context, each definition given by the authors of what an effective teacher is necessarily influenced by cultural, socioeconomic, and personal factors of who defines them. Based on this, it is not easy to find a precise definition, and above all, one that adapts to the educational contexts of higher education around the world. Nevertheless, when it comes to analyzing the result of the teaching variable, there is a broad consensus. In that case, teacher effectiveness is defined as a teacher's ability to use and apply approaches, strategies, connections to students, and a precise set of attitudes that makes students learn and achieve in class and out of it (Strong et al., 2011).

When referring to the effective EFL teacher, it is common to find characteristics in the literature that the authors call their own and unique, precisely due to their field of action and work (Heredia-Arboleda et al., 2021). Even though there is no consensus on the typical characteristics of an effective EFL teacher, invaluable information and literature have been generated over the last decade. This information has made it possible to outline, in a certain way, a profile that is very useful to those who work in higher education institutions. Hence, the objective of this study is to identify the main effective EFL teacher traits from students' perspectives based on the existing literature from the last seven years. Therefore, it intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the research design characteristics applied in the studies of identification of effective EFL teacher traits?

2. What are the research design characteristics applied in the studies of identification o effective EFL teacher traits?

3. What are the dimensions-areas studied to define the effective EFL teacher?

4. What are the predominant features that make an EFL teacher effective?

Methodology

This study was carried out through the documentary analysis to check, identify, and extract from a set of academic articles the most relevant information necessary to understand its content (Peña Vera & Pirella Morillo, 2007). This process puts criteria and strategies for searching, selecting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing information to accomplish the study's objective (Bermeo-Yaffar et al., 2016). The research was effectuated in different academic engines such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Academia. Different formulas based on these keywords *effective EFL teacher*, *teacher effectiveness*, *teacher characteristics*, and *students' perceptions* were used. They were applied in the same way in all three search engines.

On the one hand, Table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the articles based on a description of four variables. On the other hand, Table 2 shows the papers that were selected. All of them are characterized by presenting their results as a hierarchically ordered list. Thus, the most relevant results are established at the beginning of the list in their findings sections.

Table 1.
Selection criteria

Description	Comprise	Omit
Publication nature	Primary articles and peer-reviewed	Book chapters Dissertations Thesis
Publication year	2015-2021	Before 2015 and after December 2021
Language	English	Other languages
Focus	Effective EFL teacher/professor	Effective ESL teacher/professor
Participants	University students	Primary Secondary students

Table 2.

List of articles used in the review

Authors (year)	Article
Demiroz & Yesilyurt, (2015)	Effective Foreign Language Teaching: Perceptions of Prospective English Language Teachers.
Zamani & Ahangari, (2016)	Characteristics of an Effective English Language Teacher (EELT) as Perceived by Learners of English.
Khaerati, (2016)	The Students' Perception on the Characteristics of Effective and Ineffective English Language Teachers
Febriyante, (2018)	Investigating English department students' Perceptions about a good English language teacher.
Karim et al., (2020)	Uncovering Student Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Characteristics of Effective EFL Teacher Educators.
Metruk, (2020)	Qualities of a Good and Effective Teacher: Slovak EFL Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers' Perspectives.
Karim, (2021)	Bridging the Gaps between Teacher Educators and Student Teachers' Perceptions about the Attributes of Effective Teacher Educators.
Shojaei et al., (2021)	Exploring the Characteristics of Iranian EFL teachers from the perspective of Educators, Teachers, and Learners.
Metruk, (2021)	Male and Female University Students' Perceptions of an Effective EFL Teacher.
Wirantaka & Wahyudianawati, (2021)	Characteristics of Effective English Teacher for Millenials

Findings

This section is organized in a way that we answer all proposed research questions regarding the sample study, study design, dimension-areas, and predominant features.

Q1. What are the research design characteristics applied in the studies of identification of effective EFL teacher traits?

Table 1 shows that most of the studies were carried out in Indonesia (50%). The sample of 50% of the studies had more than 101 participants. The largest group comprised 408 participants. There is no study in Latin America.

Table 3.

Sampling characteristics of research articles

Variable	Details	N	%
Country	Turkey	1	10%
	Iran	2	20%
	Indonesia	5	50%
	Slovakia	2	20%
Type of university[a]	Private	5	41.66%
	Public	7	58.33%
Sampling number	between 4 - 50	2	20%
	51- 100	3	30%
	101-200	2	20%
	300 - 410	3	30%

[a] *Two studies were conducted in both private and public universities, so the sum in this case is not 10 but 12.*

Q2. What are the research design characteristics applied in the studies of identification o effective EFL teacher traits?

Table 4 shows the instruments applied in each study. The majority of investigations used a quantitative approach. As a data collection instrument, most of them used an adapted questionnaire. All of them are from relevant authors and experts in this field.

Table 4.

Study design characteristics of research articles

		N	%
Type	Quantitative	8	80%
	Qualitative	2	20%
	Mixed	0	0
Instrument	Adapted Questionnaire	8	80%
	Interview[a]	1	10%
	Data in the form of an essay[b]	1	10%

a Wirantaka & Wahyudianawati, (2021)

Q3. What are the dimensions-areas studied to define the effective EFL teacher?

Table 5 summarizes all the authors' areas to define an effective teacher. They used them in a different order or even different terms; however, they are related. Only one study (S3) has included an extra dimension called "*teacher's appearance*." It refers to the physical aspect of the EFL professor.

Table 5.
Dimensions used to define effective EFL teachers

S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
1) Pedagogical knowledge 2) Socio-affective skills 3)Organization and communication skills	1) English proficiency 2)Pedagogical knowledge 3) Organization and communication skills 4) Socio-affective skills	1) Teacher personality & performance 2) Teacher's Competence/Professionalism 3)Teacher's Appearance	1) Organization and communication skills 2) Pedagogical knowledge 3) Socio-affective skills 4) English proficiency	1) Subject matter Knowledge 2)Pedagogical Knowledge 3)Organization and Communication Skills 4)Socio-affective Skills

S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
57 items in a list.[a] Four options each 1 = unimportant quality 2 = slightly important 3 = moderately 4 = very important	1) Subject matter knowledge (SMK), 2) Pedagogical knowledge (PK) 3) Organization and communication skills (OCS) 4) Socio-affective skills (SAS).	1) Subject matter knowledge 2) Teachers' personal and interpersonal aspects 3) Approaches to language teaching	57 items in a list.[b] Four options each 1 = unimportant quality 2 = slightly important 3 = moderately 4 = very important	1) Socio-affective skills 2) Pedagogical knowledge 3) Subject-matter knowledge 4) Personality characteristics

[a] *It includes items related to all the four dimensions used in other studies (SMK, PK, OCS, SAS)*
[b] *It has items related to all the four dimensions used in other studies (SMK, PK, OCS, SAS)*

Q4. What are the predominant features that make an EFL teacher effective?

Figure 1 shows the four most frequent dimensions/areas used in the studies. These are *Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK)*, *Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)*, *Organization and Communication Skills (OCS)*, and *Socio-affective Skills (SAS)*. These four most frequent dimensions have also been used to organize information in Table 6.

Figure 1.

Most frequent dimensions used in the studies

Table 6 indicates the four main dimensions that authors have used to carry out their studies. Each dimension has the most important findings from each study (2 per each); the origin of the data comes from a ranking, that is, a list ordered hierarchically. They are copied from their source. It clearly shows that *Socio-affective skills (SAS)* are the most relevant aspect that effective EFL teachers should consider.

Table 6.

Predominant characteristics of an effective EFL teacher

Dimensions-Areas	Most relevant features	N
Subject matter knowledge (SMK)	*- Teachers should correct students indirectly.* *- Excellent English proficiency* *- Be able to read English well* *- Should master the language (English).* *- Being able to pronounce English words correctly* *- Should have cultural awareness of the target language.* *-Accuracy in English pronunciation* *- Being knowledgeable*	8
Pedagogical knowledge (PK)	*- Use communicative language teaching strategies such as assigning group tasks, pair work, and project-based learning.* *- Having in-depth knowledge about the subject/material.* *- Ability to make courses exciting and motivate students.* *- Make courses interesting to attract students' attention.* *- Be able to present content to students in a meaningful way.* *- Teach speaking as the most necessary qualities.* *- Present content in a meaningful way.* *- Provide effective feedback*	8
Organization and communication skills (OCS)	*- Ability to maintain discipline in the classroom* *- Be able to provide clear instructions for tasks.* *- Speak audibly and clearly*	3

Socio-affective skills (SAS)	*- Ability to develop proper relationships with students* *- Ability to build students' confidence* *- Pleasing* *- Giving attention to her students* *- Ability to analyze students* *- Be friendly to students* *- Be fair and correct* *- Helping students to develop self-confidence in using English.* *- Enhancing students' motivation (x2)* *- Creating a good classroom atmosphere.*	11

Discussion and Conclusion

In this literature review, we aimed to determine the predominant characteristics of the effective EFL teacher from students' perspectives and based on the existing literature from the last seven years. Considering the findings of this study, we can say that there are different perspectives to define the attributes of an effective EFL university teacher. Ten journal articles were analyzed to fulfill the objective, so the most relevant information is explained here.

First, four dimensions are established, and most of the authors consider them to define the features of an effective EFL university teacher. They are *Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK)*, *Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)*, *Organization and Communication Skills (OCS)*, and *Socio-affective Skills (SAS)*. They are in line with previous studies (Arikan et al., 2008; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Park & Lee, 2006; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2010). Second, the characteristics of an effective teacher are focused on three main areas. On the one hand, Socio-affective skills are the most significant. These features are labeled differently because it depends on the authors' questionnaire; nevertheless, the unfathomable meaning is similar. As in all other knowledge areas, professors must have some essential SAS to interact with their learners and keep the teaching-learning process successful.

Borg (2006) insists on the importance of the relationship between teachers and students. According to his study, this skill permits teachers to create a good affinity with their students, so it should be considered. Likewise, in their study, Heredia-Arboleda et al. (2021) refer to emotional intelligence and humanism. The authors mention that these two skills should guide the ELTs' work because they empower them with "an autonomous outlook endowed by responsibility towards themselves and their learners" (Heredia-Arboleda et al., 2021, p.1531). On the other hand, two dimensions seem to be equal to university students. They are *Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK)* and *Pedagogical Knowledge (PK)*. The first one refers to what teachers know about English, in this case as a foreign language. In this dimension, students coincide with the idea that an EFL teacher should have a good language proficiency level since all the studies were conducted in non-English speaking countries. The second one refers to what teachers know about their 'work=teaching,' which is the pedagogical subject. Thus, both are essential features that teachers should consider to be effective instructors. Finally, the *Organization and Communication Skills (OCS)* dimension is irrelevant for most participants.

SAS is the most significant dimension of the list. It is relevant to mention that SAS should be a variable that should be considered by tertiary education institutions inasmuch as the class atmosphere is active, mutable, and demanding. In this ongoing process, students' participation and feedback are essential for professors to evaluate, modify, question, and change their teaching-learning practices. Likewise, public and private institutions should contemplate and include socio-affective skills training courses for their professors due to the imperative importance of the teacher-student relationship in the classroom and how it influences its development.

In short, even though many studies in this field have been conducted, the common point is that an effective EFL university teacher should comprise four dimensions (SMK, PK, OCS, and SAS). Most of the studies' findings (9/10) matched each other using the four dimensions, but they differ in their agreement on the shared traits. According to 1679 university students in four countries between two continents, three main general features make an effective EFL teacher. Thus, literature is scarce in Latin America. Future studies in this context and with this type of population would be interesting and necessary.

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