How to Become an Effective English Language Teacher

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Abstract

Teaching has been one of the most important issues that the researchers and educators have been working on constantly because education is the unique way that can enhance the development of a nation. The nations with a good education system and qualified teachers are more likely to become powerful and prominent nations in the world we live. Research has proven that the teacher has an important role in the foreign language learning process and the students, their parents/supervisors, the stakeholders, and the society have some expectations from the teachers during the teaching and learning process. The mismatches between the students' and the teacher's expectations can affect the second language students' satisfaction with the language class negatively and can most probably lead to the discontinuation of their second language study. Effective language teaching has become a prominent issue in the field of education as there has been a great demand on learning foreign languages throughout the world. In the process of foreign language learning, the language teacher has a very important role on the students and their success depends on the skills of the teachers. This comparative study aims to find out the ideas and views of the Turkish university preparatory school students on the effective teacher. In addition, the ideas and views of the native and nonnative English teachers are also investigated to find out if there are any differences between the ideas and views of the students and the teachers.

1. Introduction

In the age of globalization, it has been accepted that English has become the lingua franca and there is a marvelous trend in learning English throughout the world. Many institutions and language courses offer various courses to teach English and approximately 1 billion people around the world are attending these courses to learn and become fluent in this lingua franca.

Research has proven that the teacher has an important role in the foreign language learning process and the students, their parents/supervisors, the stakeholders, and the society have some expectations from the teachers during the teaching and learning process. Schulz (1996) argued that the mismatches between the students' and the teacher's expectations can affect the second language students' satisfaction with the language class negatively and can most probably lead to the discontinuation of their second language study.

Many researchers have conducted various studies on effective teaching and effective teacher and they have concluded that it is very difficult to explain effective teaching and effective teacher precisely because there are a lot of criteria that can affect the effectiveness of teaching and teacher; however, some basic points and skills have been identified from their results.

2. Effective Teaching

Effective teaching involves the ability to provide instruction that helps students to develop the knowledge, skills, and understandings intended by curriculum objectives, create an instructional climate that causes students to develop positive attitudes toward school and self, adjust instruction so that all students learn, irrespective of their ability, ethnicity, or other characteristics, manage the classroom so that students are engaged in learning all or most of the time, make sound decisions and plans that maximize students' opportunity to learn, and respond to initiatives for curriculum change so that the new curriculum's intents are fully realized (Acheson and Gall, 2003).

Murray (1991, as cited in Bell, 2005) stated that many researchers and professionals for teacher development and evaluation have been seeking to establish criteria for assessing effective teaching. While there is little agreement regarding which specific behaviors constitute effective teaching, researchers agree at least on some dimensions that describe effective teaching in general regardless of the subject matter. These include enthusiasm or expressiveness, clarity of explanation, and rapport or interaction.

Berliner and Rosenshine (1977), Blair (2000), Brophy and Good (1986), Cawelti (1999), Cotton (2000), Demmon-Berger (1986), Good and Brophy (1997), Marzano, Pickering, and McTighe (1993), Porter and Brophy (1988), Shellard and Protheroe (2000), Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (1999), and Wenglinsky (2000, as cited in Stronge, 2002) conducted research on effective teaching and they have come into the conclusion that effective teachers are interested in having students learn and demonstrate understanding of meanings rather than merely memorizing facts or events, place priority on reading because it affects success in other content areas and overall achievement gains, and students have higher achievement rates when the focus of instruction is on meaningful conceptualization, especially when it builds on and emphasizes their own knowledge of the world.

3. Effective Teacher

Researchers and scholars have tried for over a century to create a schema that would describe and codify effective teachers. Kratz (1896, as cited in McEwan, 2002) asked a group of students to identify the characteristics that distinguished the teachers from whom they learned the most from those whom they liked the most. Four characteristics of teachers who were successful were found out to be making greater demands of the students, more teaching skill, more knowledge of subject matter, and better discipline.

There are many ways to characterize the components that make up an effective teacher. These components include content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and knowledge of educational contexts (Clark and Walsh, 2002).

Walker (2008) found out that there were 12 identifiable personal and professional characteristics of an effective teacher in his study and these characteristics included being prepared, being positive, having high expectations, being creative, being fair, displaying a personal touch, developing a sense of belonging, admitting the mistakes, having a sense of humor, giving respect to students, forgiving, and being compassionate.

Taşkafa (1989, as cited in Telli, den Brok, and Çakıroğlu, 2008) interviewed 43 middle school students and asked them to write down their teacher's desirable and non-desirable characteristics. Giving positive reinforcement, interacting friendly with students, and understanding students' feelings were the most frequently mentioned desirable characteristics. The non-desirable characteristics of a teacher in this study were: isolating some of the students, giving specific students preferential treatment, denying students chances to perform or to talk in class, sneering at students, and demanding students to learn.

Çetin (2001, as cited in Telli, den Brok, and Çakıroğlu, 2008) conducted a study with 100 higher education students to find out the ideal teacher behaviors which were defined as understanding, cooperative, be aware of students' individual differences and general student psychology, together with having good subject matter knowledge and using different teaching methods in the class.

4. Effective Foreign Language Teaching

Brosh (1996) asked second language teachers and students to identify the three most prominent characteristics of an effective second language teacher from a list of 20 characteristics and the results of the study revealed that the students' and teachers' first and second rank-ordered items were identical which were the teachers' adequate command of the subject matter involving the teachers' mastery of the four basic skills and the ability of the language teacher to transmit knowledge in a way that is easy to understand and remember, and to motivate their students to do their best. In general, the desirable characteristics of an effective second language teacher that emerged from the study were knowledge and command of the target language, the ability to organize, explain, and clarify, as well as to arouse and sustain interest and motivation among students, fairness to students by showing neither favoritism nor prejudice, and availability to students.

According to Bell (2005), the research literature suggests that there is no single accepted definition of effective foreign language teaching. Foreign language teaching is a complex, multidimensional process that means different things to different people. An effective foreign language teacher is the teacher who is clear and enthusiastic in teaching that provides learners with the grammatical (syntactical and morphological), lexical, phonological, pragmatic, and socio-cultural knowledge and interactive practice they need to communicate successfully in the target language.

Demirel (1990) and Saraç-Süzer (2007, as cited in Arıkan, Taşer, and Süzer, 2008) studied the qualities attached to an effective foreign language teacher and listed having personal strategies to teach, creating a positive classroom atmosphere, to be able to a model teacher, being knowledgeable on target cultures, possessing positive personal

characteristics, having correct pronunciation of the English sounds, teaching with effective classroom materials, and using technology as the most common features.

5. Statement of Problem

Effective language teaching has become a prominent issue in the field of education as there has been a great demand on learning foreign languages throughout the world. In the process of foreign language learning, the language teacher has a very important role on the students and their success depends on the skills of the teachers.

This comparative study aims to find out the ideas and views of the Turkish university preparatory school students on the effective teacher. In addition, the ideas and views of the native and nonnative English teachers are also investigated to find out if there are any differences between the ideas and views of the students and the teachers.

This study aims to find an answer to the following research questions:

1. What are the most important characteristics of an effective English language teacher according to the Turkish university preparatory school students?
2. What are the most important characteristics of an effective English language teacher according to the nonnative English teachers?
3. What are the most important characteristics of an effective English language teacher according to the native English teachers?
4. Are there any similarities and differences in the important characteristics of an effective English language teacher among the Turkish university preparatory school students, nonnative English teachers, and native English teachers?

6. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 38 students, 7 nonnative English teachers and 7 native English teachers. These students were attending the preparatory program of a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. The participants' age range was between 18 and 22. 7 of the participants were male and 31 of them were female students.

The nonnative English teachers were teaching at the preparatory program of a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. All the teachers were experienced in their field and they have been teaching English for more than 10 years. The nonnative English teachers' age range was between 30 and 36. 2 of them were male and 5 of them were female.

The native English teachers were teaching at the School of Foreign Languages department of a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. All the teachers were experienced in their field and they have been teaching English for more than 10 years. The nonnative English teachers' age range was between 30 and 42. 4 of them were male and 3 of them were female.

7. Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 24 items on what an effective foreign language teacher should do and they were rated on a four-point scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, and 4= strongly agree). This instrument made extensive use of Bell's (2005, as cited in Brown, 2009) questionnaire and evolved after being piloted three times with different second language learners. Participants indicated their views and ideas by using this scale.

8. Procedure

The participants completed the questionnaire which lasted 20 minutes and the results of the questionnaire were analyzed to find the answers of the research questions of the study.

9. Data Analysis

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed via SPSS 15. For the first three research questions, descriptive statistics were used to get the mean scores of the items in the questionnaire.

For the fourth research question, Kruskal Wallis test was conducted to check if the differences between the scores were significant or not. The reason to conduct Kruskal Wallis test was that two of the independent variables had a