

Students' perceptions of teachers' characteristics

تصورات الطلاب لخصائص المعلمين

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Abstract

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This study investigated the degree of students' perceptions of their teachers' personal and professional characteristics at Umm- Alqura University during the year 2017. The participants were (297) ranging from freshman to seniors at the college of education .The data was collected by asking the students at the beginning of the semester to write what the personal and professional characteristics that they believe to have had a positive effect on their learning. The written opinions of the students were then collected, analyzed using the qualitative method and put into a questionnaire that consisted of(29) items that were put into two dimensions the personal and the professional. Then, a comparison between male and female opinions of the effective teacher was conducted. The results showed that students favored some characteristics over the other, but the most favored dimension among the students was the personal dimension .The findings also revealed that teachers' characteristics do make an important difference on students learning.

Key Words: Professional Characteristics ,Teacher, Personal Characteristics.

الملخص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية التعرف إلى درجة إدراك الطلبة لخصائص المعلمين الشخصية والمهنية في جامعة أم القرى خلال سنة ٢٠١٧، واشتملت الدراسة على (٢٩٧) طالباً وطالبة من طلبة السنة الأولى إلى الرابعة من كلية التربية. حيث تم جمع البيانات عن طريق طرح سؤال على الطلبة في بداية الفصل الدراسي حول ما يعتقدون أنه يميز المعلم من خصائص شخصية ومهنية ويمكن أن يكون لها تأثيراً إيجابياً فيتعلم الطلبة، ثم تم جمع آراء الطلبة الخطية وتحليلها نوعياً تمهيداً لتضمينها في استبانة الدراسة التي تألفت من (٢٩) فقرة؛ صنفت في بُعدين رئيسيين هما: السمات الشخصية، السمات المهنية، ثم تم إجراء مقارنة بين الذكور والإناث حول آرائهم بالخصائص السابقة. وأظهرت النتائج أن خصائص المعلمين تلعب دوراً في تعلم الطلبة، كما أن الطلاب يفضلون بعض الخصائص عن الأخرى في المعلم ولكن المحور المفضل لدى الطلبة كان المحور الشخصي، وفي ضوء هذه النتائج تم تقديم بعض التوصيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخصائص المهنية، المعلم، الخصائص الشخصية.

Introduction:

Traditionally university students have not been given many opportunities to offer their insights and comments on education. This paper reports on a study which asked university students to list the characteristics of effective teachers. Their perceptions are congruent with the literature and one of the several conclusions is that teachers, in education should pay attention to what students have to say about the characteristics of effective teachers. (Ampadu,2012 &Trim,2007)

Teachers can have an enriching effect on the daily lives of students and their lifelong educational and career aspirations. Providing teachers with feedback about their teaching, whether it be from colleagues, administrators or students, is an important aspect of school improvement. These teachers also play a great role in student learning. Years of research on teacher quality support the fact that teachers not only make students feel good about school and learning, but also that their work actually results in students learning more (Tierno,2008). Studies have reasoned that a whole range of personal and professional qualities are associated with student learning. For example, verbal ability, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, certification status, ability to use a range of teaching strategies skillfully, and enthusiasm for the subject characterize more successful teachers (Fareh, 2018).

Research indicates that improved teacher characteristics are most likely to produce substantial gains in students' learning(Heather, 2015 & Al-Hazmi, 2014). A study done by (Jamei,2016: 3) 122 secondary students were asked to describe their good teachers "being understanding, having a certain personality, being a motivator and a supporter, and listening to students wishes, varying work methods, the teacher's personality, being supportive and encouraging ect".

In the teaching process, teachers play an important role in students learning, the teacher and the students' achievement are tied together. Garcaa (2010) has shown that the teacher performed the most important role in the process of learning. The goal of most teachers, in the classroom is to improve the students' academic achievements. The teacher him/herself is a major factor that may influence this improvement of achievement. Heather (2015)states that the teachers cognitive, emotional, personal, professional and psychological factors play a great role in the students' academic achievement. It has also been shown by researchers, such as Lewis & Jackson (2012), Wilburn&Hom(2013),Herndon & Gregory (2010), that the single most important factor affecting student achievement is the teacher. In addition the effect of teachers on students

achievements is seen to be cumulative. Therefore, what makes the most difference in improving student achievement is a "knowledgeable, skillful teacher" in the classroom.

Teacher characteristics beyond content knowledge and pedagogical skills have been an important predictor of student achievement. It is also said that, an effective teacher is a teacher who is always aware that effective teaching is about establishing the conditions under which a kind of transformation can take place in the minds of the students. Smith (2011;206) define effective teaching:

"Most people would agree that good teachers are caring, supportive, concerned about the welfare of students, knowledgeable about their subject matter, able to get along with parents, and genuinely excited about the work that they do, teachers with professional and personal characteristics are able to help students learn".Kane, (2015)stated that teachers are those who have a sense of purpose, have expectations of success for all students, tolerate ambiguity, demonstrate a willingness to adapt and change to meet student needs, reflect on students' work, learn from a variety of models and enjoy work and students.

Rubio, (2010) argue that effective teachers do not teach in front of the class doing a good demonstration on the extensive and deep content knowledge, they teach to promote and enhance learning. Besides, they knows how to manage, not only their knowledge, but also the classroom and the students in terms of discipline, work, interaction between teacher- Effective teachers -professional and personal skills students-students, how to give instructions, and how to assess and evaluate activities, the students and their own work. Therefore, to be effective teachers also imply to have a series of qualities, in terms of professional and personal skills. (Rubio, 2010).

Sparks,allsop& Harris (2014), concluded that effective teachers are not simply charismatic and persuasive presenters but are individuals who engage their students in in robust cognitive and social tasks. Smith (2011)define Effective teachers as teachers who are caring, supportive, concerned about the welfare of students, knowledgeable about their subject matter, able to get along with parents, and genuinely excited about the work that they do. They are the teachers who are able to help students learn. Therefore good teaching is not about just technique but about teachers characteristics. and that is why the current study aimed at investigating the following research questions.

The research questions:

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the main teachers' personal and professional characteristics that play a role in students learning from their perspectives?
2. Are there differences in the level of personal and professional characteristics of the teachers in their impact on students learning due to gender?

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this study was to give the university students a chance by facilitating their participation in a survey which investigated what they considered to be the most important characteristics of effective teachers. The study intends to show some of the main characteristics a teacher needs to have in order to improve the achievements of his/her students. Such characteristics may include knowledge of the subject of the course; personal love of the material; to be a good listener, liking students and have a high regard for the learners, in addition to some personal characteristics that include sense of humor, intellectual interest, enthusiasm towards teaching, fairness, kindness, patience, respect, creativeness, caring and flexibility. In other words this paper intends to examine the teachers' professional and personal characteristics that are favored by the students and may help them become better learners.

Significance of the study:

The significance of this study lies both in its theoretical and practical importance, theoretically it will set the guidelines for teachers characteristics both professionally and personally and the study will help teachers, who lack the characteristics of an effective teacher, develop these characteristics in order to improve students' learning. The results of the study will also help in-service teachers as well as pre-service teachers develop the qualities that lead to effective teaching allowing them to create and sustain connectivity in their classrooms.

Definitions of Key terms:

Professional characteristics: They are the professional qualifications that teachers possess and are able to use these skills and experiences related to their profession such as "being good at his/her job", "involves students", "plans his/her material well", "knowledgeable", "Listen to students comments" and "Sets well organized goals". And such characteristics were measured from students responses as was done in the study.

Personal characteristics: They are the personal qualifications that teachers possess and are able to use these skills and experiences related to their profession such as "Self confidence", "Enthusiastic", "Helpful", "Fair", "Patient", "Optimistic", "Respectful", and "Honest". And such characteristics were measured from students' responses as was done in the study.

Limitations of the Study:

Subject limitations: the study looked at the teachers' personal and professional characteristics that play a role in students learning from their perspectives only.

Human Limitations: It was limited to male and female students in the college of education.

Spatial limitations: it was limited to Umm-Alqura university students in Makkah.

Time limitations: The study was limited to the academic year of 2014-2015.

Literature review:

Research as done by Alos, Caranto & David (2015) showed that students learning is affected by Factors; Personal Condition, Study Habits, Home-Related Aspect, School-related Aspect.

Studying the relationship between the teacher's characteristics and student's achievement goes back to many years, these studies sought to determine the extent of the relationship between teacher characteristics and student outcomes and to provide an indication of the order of importance among the teacher characteristics. A study done by Clark (2014) showed that positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation. The success of any interpersonal relationship is dependent to a large extent upon input from both the teacher and the student. In the classroom setting, it is the teacher who has the opportunity, and the responsibility, to initiate positive interpersonal relationships. The teacher who is active in demonstrating closeness, trust, respect, warmth, acceptance, understanding and care towards his or her students helps in initiating positive teacher-student relationships, and increases the likelihood of building strong relationships that will endure over time.

A similar study done by Camp, (2011) studied the relationships between teachers and students academic performance and behavior in a small town elementary school involving 500 teachers in Kansas. the study showed that these teachers believe that there is value in

forming and maintaining positive and supportive relationships with their students in providing for their students' academic achievement and behavioral success.

Tomoana,(2012)introduced several factors that contribute to successful teaching, those factors include building relationships; baseline data & formative evaluation; Learning in context; scaffolding; and deliberate acts of teaching (this includes stating learning goals, success criteria, explicit teaching of how to learn, using the teachable moment, regular prompt feedback).

A study done by Divoll (2010) showed that good relationship between teacher and his/ her students help to dramatically decrease problems with student behavior, as well as help resolve problems peacefully when you do have them. These findings indicated the importance of teachers building solid relationships as they have a direct impact on academic achievement for years to come.

McCollum (2014) show that effective teachers are those who are effective emphasize relationships in educational contexts, which allow students to have more opportunities to experience improved student learning and overall student success.

Salkind (2008) showed that a teacher who is excited about the subject being taught and shows it by facial expression, voice inflection, gesture, and general movement is more likely to hold the attention of students than one who does not exhibit these behaviors. This is true whether or not teachers consciously perceived these behaviors in themselves.

Akiri, (2013) also indicates that effective teachers positively influence the academic achievement of students. However, students' related factors were also found to have influence either positive or negative on students' academic outcomes.

Downey (2008) conducted a study synthesizing educational research on factors that affect students academic success. The aim of the study was to examine the classroom practices that made a difference for all students. What was determined was that a teacher's personal interaction with his/her students made a significant difference. The recommendations from Downey's analysis were that students need teachers to build strong interpersonal relationships with them, focusing on strengths of the students while maintaining high and realistic expectations for success. These interactive relationships should be based on respect, trust, caring, and cohesiveness. Studies such as Gill, &Reynolds, (2010) show that teachers with positive attitudes also possess high expectations for success.

Hamre, et al (2012) also investigated the importance of teacher–student relationships. They showed that positive relationships between teacher and student serve as a resource to students as it helps maintain their engagement in academic pursuits.

From the previous studies it is obvious that research has greatly focused on effective teachers and how they affects students learning also as shown from the previous studies professional and personal characteristics do effect student achievement in one way or another. All this helped the researcher in being able to conduct the study and in being able to classify the professional and personal characteristics of the teacher.

Method:

Research Design:

The current study used surveys where descriptive methodology was used. The researcher used this method because it achieves the intended goals.

Participants:

The population in this study consisted of all the students in the college of education in both the female and male sections during the academic year of 2017-2018. The participants of the study were (297) students chosen randomly from the college of education ranging from freshman to seniors at Umm- Alqura university- Makkah. Among the participants, there were (171) female students and (126) male students.

Data Collection:

The data was collected by asking the students at the beginning of the fall semester of 2017 to write what they thought characterizes the successful teacher. In addition they were asked to write down what they thought helps them learn more. The students were also asked to answer questions as: What are the qualities that combine to create an excellent memorable teacher? Why do some teachers inspire students to work three times harder than they normally would, while other inspires them to skip classes? What is it that makes you as a student learn from some teachers more than others? What are the characteristics of an effective teacher in your opinion that play a role in your learning?

The written opinions of the students were then collected, analyzed and then put in a questionnaire form that consisted of two dimensions: the professional dimension and the personal dimension.

Instrument:

The researcher had formed a questionnaire that consisted of two dimensions based on the data collected, the following list of characteristics appeared in the students writings: knowledgeable, respectful, optimistic, collaboration, enthusiastic, has high expectations of students, sense of humor, sets well organized goals, modest, professional, calm, engages students in a variety of learning activities, friendly, Intelligent, patient, motivating, Involves students, creative, playful, ethical, caring, Is challenging, honest, fair, plans his material well, helpful, has a positive attitude toward his/her job, Self confident and listen to students comments.

The researcher then divided the characteristics of the teacher that were reported by the students into two categories. Which were then classified into personal and professional characteristics as follows:

Teachers' personal and professional characteristics

Number	Professional	Personal
1	Knowledgeable	Self confident
2	Listen to students comments	Sense of Humor
3	Has a positive attitude toward his/her job	Enthusiastic
4	Involves students	Playful
5	Plans his material well	Honest
6	Sets well organized goals	Modest
7	Is challenging	Helpful
8	Has high expectations of students	Fair
9	Intelligent	Caring
10	Motivating	Patient
11	engages students in a variety of learning activities	Creative
12	Ethical	Calm
13	Professional	Friendly
14	Collaboration	Optimistic
15		Respectful

The researcher afterwards gave the questionnaire to a number of faculty members in Umm- Alqura university in the college of education majoring in measurement and evaluation also teaching methods in order to evaluate the questionnaire that was designed by the researcher based on the students writings.

The researcher then developed the questionnaire in its last form which consisted of two dimensions the professional and personal. Professional consisted of (14) items whereas the personal consisted of (15) items together the questionnaire was formed with (29) items from both the personal and the professional characteristics that were put on a five point-likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

To make sure that the questionnaire achieves the aims of the study the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were checked.

Validity:

The instrument was given to a panel of ten university professors of methods of teaching, and evaluation and measurement. The purpose of this was to check the clarity of items, its relevance to the dimensions and the questionnaire as a whole. The reviewers' remarks were primarily related to language and clarity.

Reliability:

It was measured by the most common measure of internal consistency which is using Cronbach Alpha equation. Cronbach Alpha was calculated using a sample of (74) students as an evidence of reliability, the alpha coefficients are shown in table (1).

Table (1) Results of Cronbach alpha

Areas	Number of Characteristics	Cronbach alpha
Personal	15	.81
Professional	14	.76
Total	29	.74

Results

The study tended to answer the research questions stated above:

To address the first question the means and standard deviations for each item were calculated and then ordered from the most effective characteristics that play a role in students learning to the least effective characteristics according to the students responses based on the mean as shown in table two (2 and 3).

Table (2) The means and standard deviations for the most effective personal characteristics that play a role in students learning to the least effective characteristics based on mean

Number	personal characteristics	Mean	SD	Importance
1	Self Confidence	4.5253	.7712	high
2	Fair	4.3030	.8235	high
3	Intelligent	4.2929	.8920	high
4	Sense of Humor	4.2929	.8690	high
5	modest	4.1616	.9084	high
6	calm	4.1515	.9375	high
7	playful	4.1414	.9967	high
8	helpful	4.1313	.9298	high
9	Honest	4.1313	1.0032	high
10	motivating	4.1111	1.0738	high
11	respectful	3.9596	.9218	high
12	patient	3.9596	.9218	high
13	friendly	3.8889	.9645	high
14	Enthusiastic	3.3939	.9845	high
15	optimistic	3.2525	1.1770	high

From table(2 it is clear that the most top five personal effective characteristics that play a role in students learning are: self confidence on a ($M=4.5$, $SD= .77$), fair on ($M= 4.3$, $SD= .82$), Intelligent on ($M=4.2$, $SD=.89$), sense of humor on ($M=4.2$, $SD= .86$) and Modest on ($M=4.1$, $SD=.90$).

The result is supported by a study done by Tucker & Stronge, (2010) that showed some of the key qualities of the teachers: have formal teacher preparation training, hold certification of some kind (standard, alternative, or provisional) and are certified within their fields, have taught for at least three years, are caring, fair, and respectful.

Also the studies done by (Cimer, Çimer & Vekli, 2013; Raymundo, 2014; Zakzak, 2016) report that effective teachers are enthusiastic, have warmth, and possess a sense of humor and these characteristics play an effective role in students' learning.

Table (3) The means and standard deviations for the most effective professional characteristics that play a role in students learning to the least effective characteristics based on mean

Number	Professional characteristics	Mean	SD	Importance
1	Set well organized goals	4.4242	.8434	high
2	skilled	4.4142	.8331	high
3	Has a positive attitude toward his/her job	4.3939	.8755	high
4	Involves students	4.3939	1.0149	high
5	knowledgeable	4.3636	.9056	high
6	Plans his material well	4.3535	.8927	high
7	Has high expectations of students	4.2929	1.0193	High
8	Management	4.2727	.8521	High
9	collaborative	4.2222	1.0612	High
10	Is challenging	3.9091	.8434	High
11	Professional	3.5758	1.0076	High
12	engages students in a variety of learning activities	3.5455	1.0095	High
13	Ethical	3.0202	1.0747	High
14	Listens to students comments	2.0909	1.1574	Low

From table (3) it is clear that the most top five effective professional characteristics that play a role in students learning are: sets well organized goals on ($M=4.4$, $SD=.84$), skilled on ($M=4.4$, $SD=.83$), has positive attitude toward his/her job on ($M=4.3$, $SD=.87$), involves students on ($M=4.3$, $SD=1.0$) and is knowledgeable on a ($M=4.3$, $SD=.90$).

This result of the study is supported by a study done by Olaleye (2013) on the Perception of teachers' knowledge, attitude and teaching skills as predictor of academic performance in Nigerian secondary schools showed that the students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter, attitude to work and teaching skills has a significant relationship on students' academic performance.

Another study was conducted by Tek (2014) "Teachers with a high job satisfaction (who have the feeling that they can mean a lot to their students and that they can make a difference in the learning of students) are willing to invest a lot of energy and effort (instructional support) into their classes" contrary to teachers with low job satisfaction. pp.20).

Also another was a study done by Bryan(2011) described three important elements that constitute effective teaching. Those elements were knowledge of the subject; personal love of the material; good listener, liking students and a high regard for the learners. He also talks about some of the personal characteristics that include sense of humor and intellectual interest. Another study done by Heidlerand Pierce, (2013) indicated that it would be misleading and inaccurate to state that teacher expectations determine a student's success, but the research clearly establishes that teacher expectations do play a significant role in determining how well and how much students learn.

Also the means and standard deviation for each dimension were calculated (personal and professional) as shown in table (4).

Table (4)Means and Standard deviations ofthe two dimensions along with the total

Dimension	Number of Items	Means	Average Rating	SD
Professional	14	54.9	3.92	6.7
Personal	15	60.7	4.04	7.4
Total	29	106.6	3.67	12.6

Table (4) shows that the most effective dimension to students was the personal dimensions (M=60.7, SD= 4.04). While the second was the professional dimension (M= 54.9, SD= 6.7) whereas the total showed a (M= 106.6, SD= 12.6).

This goes along with a study that was done by Prusha, (2012) where he surveyed the high school seniors' perceptions of their teachers. He showed that the students cared more about the teachers' personality dimension more than the professional according to the results that appeared in the study. He showed that 81 percent of the students said that "Being patient and understanding" and "treating students with respect" were the important characteristics of an ideal teacher. Also an article by (Althaf, 2011) stressed that personal characteristics go over the professional.

To address the second research question which states if there is a difference in the perception of the students in the professional and personal characteristics of the effective teacher as viewed by male or female students? The t-test and the Means and standard deviation were calculated as shown in table (5).

Table(5)Difference in the perception of the students in the professional and personal characteristics of the effective teacher as viewed by male or female students

Dimensions	Group	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Professional	Male	54.2	7.8	-1.5	.122
	Female	55.4	5.8		
Personal	Male	59.5	8.3	-2.4	0.015
	Female	61.6	6.5		
Total	Male	104.5	14.1	-2.5	0.013
	Female	108.2	11.1		

From the table above the results show that the female students were higher than the male students on the personal dimension on a ($M=61.6$; $SD=6.5$) whereas the male students were ($M=59.0$; $SD=8.3$) therefore there was a significant difference between the two groups on $\alpha=0.015$.

The results of the study agree with a study done by Mustafa (2009) where they examined gender differences about teachers' characteristics and they found female students were more sensitive to the interpersonal characteristics of their teachers. Whereas the findings regarding the male students were more sensitive to whether their professors were knowledgeable and had a good sense of humor. Also the study done by Mustafa,(2009) showed that female students tend to emphasize interpersonal and social characteristics in teachers more than male students do.

The results also showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups on the professional dimension. And this could be due to the fact that all students whether male or female want teachers to learn from when it comes to talking about knowledge. The results also showed a significant difference $\alpha=.013$ on the total between the two groups in favor of the female students on a ($M=108.2$; $SD=11.1$) where the male students on the total were ($M=104.5$; $SD=14.1$). This could be due to the fact the female students in general tend to like studying more and further more they care about studying in a low anxiety environment. This could be supported by the studies done on teachers perceptions of students abilities, where teachers perceive female students to be harder workers and produce high quality work than male students do as the studies done be(Sam, 2016).

Conclusion:

Exploring the effects of teachers' personal and professional characteristics that play a role in students learning showed that according to students' perception teacher characteristics could have an effect on their learning. Students indicated that they definitely will do better when their teacher have effective personal and professional characteristics and will more likely achieve low if the teachers were seen as having non- effective personal and professional characteristics. This is clear evidence that there is a direct relationship between students learning and teachers' characteristics.

The results showed that students favored some characteristics over the other, but the most favored dimension among the students was the personal dimension. And that is logical because any student likes to feel comfortable in the classroom environment to be able to take knowledge from class and that was shown in the previous section of the results.

The same result was shown in a study conducted by Mcclloun, (2014) where he stated that the caring teachers are those who caring teachers that effectively support student learning as a way to address poor student achievement. Teachers have not been provided with a broad range of ideas from legislative mandates involving the affective domain of learning for improving student performance.

The findings of this study deepen our understanding of what an effective teacher should be like. It also enables the educators to enhance their knowledge and understanding and to enrich the discussion to make training programs that help any teacher become an effective teacher.

In analyzing the second research questions that asks if there is a difference in the perception of professional and personal characteristics of effective teachers as viewed by male or female students. The study showed that there was significant difference between male and female students on the personal dimension on the total as a whole, whereas no significant difference was found on the professional dimension between the two groups, for this dimension in particular it is obvious because whether you are a male or female student, you are a human being who is looking for something genuine(knowledge) in the teacher who is teaching you.

The researcher considers this research to be part of the extensive research out there in which researcher have expressed and continue to express their opinion on what is effective teaching and how it influences students learning.

Recommendations:

In the light of the study results today's classrooms present teachers with more challenges and therefore demand a deeper understanding of successful classroom practice. In light of the study results the following recommendations may be proposed:

- 1- Teachers should be enrolled in training programs during their four year study in the university.
- 2- Teacher must become active participants in their own professional development, refining their own approach to teaching and exploring resources.
- 3- The university should work on holding workshops to address diverse strengths and weaknesses of the education teachers.
- 4- Replication of this study should be conducted to include all teachers. This should include a larger sample size with observations made over a longer period of time.

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