

Qualities of an Effective English Language Teacher (EELT) from Male and Female Students' Point of view

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Received: 2015.11.17

Revisions received: 2016.3.17

Accepted: 2016.7.17
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Abstract

The role of teachers in affecting students' attitudes and motivations to language learning and teaching cannot be denied. To improve the field of foreign language teaching and learning we need to improve the qualities of EFL teachers. To achieve this goal, recognizing and identifying the qualities of effective EFL teachers is essential. So this study attempted to investigate the view points of male and female English language students about the characteristics of effective English language teachers based on four categories: English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, organization and communication skills, and socio-affective skills. For this purpose the researchers administered a questionnaire adapted from Park and Lee (2006) to 60 (28 female and 32 male) foreign language learners at Tabriz Islamic Azad University. The results of the U-Mann-Whitney test indicated that there was not a significant difference between the perceptions of the male and female students regarding the characteristics of effective teacher. However, the overall mean score of the female students' perceptions was a little bit higher than the male students. For the female students the most important features of the teacher was his/her English proficiency, socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge and organization and communication skills, while the preferences of the male students were the organization and communication skills, pedagogical knowledge, socio-affective skills and English proficiency, respectively. The findings have some implications for EFL teachers and students.

Keywords: Linguistics, Effective, Performance, Perception, Teaching methodology

Introduction

The study of the characteristics of effective teachers is an established field of enquiry in psychology and education (e.g. Becher and Trowler, 2001; Biglan, 1973; Hativa and Marincovich, 1995). Prabhu (1990) pointed out that the characteristics of EFL teachers with positive attitudes and enthusiasm strongly correlated with increasing rapport between students and teachers, and appeared to promote productive learning. Students' success or failure is caused by many factors among which we can refer to the impact of teacher. Teachers' characteristics can both encourage or discourage the students' learning. Possessing some kinds of characteristics such as knowledge of subject matters, and being able to explain the subject matters clearly seem to be insufficient for an effective EFL teacher. EFL teachers should also possess some other particular characteristics such as being relaxed, warm, supportive and so on, which might facilitate students' learning and promote good classroom atmosphere (Chen, 2012).

Ideas about this topic differ from one generation to the other and from one culture to another. Teachers might even sometimes question themselves about this and would want to know how ideal they are in the eyes of their students. Various factors determine the extent to which students identify certain qualities associated with the teaching profession. Some might consider the amount of knowledge as a basic characteristic for an ideal teacher; others might regard the techniques and methods used as the main factor for such a judgment. The way teachers behave and the methodologies they exploit in their teaching, to a large extent, depend on their perception of effective teaching, and their beliefs about teacher efficacy (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999). A great teacher is the one a student remembers and cherishes forever. Teachers have long lasting impacts on the lives of their students, and the greatest teachers inspire students toward greatness (Chen, 2012).

Learning environment is affected by many factors such as teacher, student, teaching content and resources, motivation toward learning, awareness of knowledge or skill deficits and the recognition of the needed knowledge or skill. Five major factors to be considered in learning are: memory, preparedness of mind, motivation, structure and feedback (Ghaderi, 2004).

If a teacher has positive personal characteristics and chooses authentic teaching objectives, his students are likely to achieve the intended objectives. In every educational system, teaching and what happens during the class time are integral to the goals of achievement because there is a positive correlation between teaching behavior and students' educational progress. In other words, teaching consists of the totality of teacher's behavior, which influences the learning process of students. Therefore, the most important characteristics of effective teaching are objectivity, being systematic and flexibility.

In an attempt to understand what it means to be a foreign language teacher and in what sense they are different from other teachers, Borg (2006) examined the definitions of over 200 practicing and prospective English language teachers from a variety of contexts about the distinction between language teachers and those of other fields. His analysis also included the opinions of mathematics, history, science and chemistry teachers on the extent to which characteristics claimed to be distinctive of language teachers applied to their own subjects. His participants believed that subject matter and the medium were the same in language teaching and that there was no clear distinction between them as in other subjects. Moreover, language teachers inducted learners into ways of thinking and being, which reflect those of the target culture.

In terms of content, language teaching was regarded to be more complex and varied than other subjects. In terms of methodology, in the afore-mentioned study, the methods, the activities and the material used by or available to English language teachers were reported to be different from those in the other subjects. It was also found that English language teaching methodology was more progressive than that of other subjects, and consequently, English language teachers needed to be more up-to-date to cope with advanced and progressive nature of language teaching methodology. In Berliner's (1992) words, these teachers have the following 10 characteristics: (a) monitor students' work, check progress, and give feedback, (b) structure

lessons and communicate expectations through objectives, (c) pace instruction rapidly, (d) ask questions requiring analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, (e) provide waiting time for answers,

(f) communicate high expectations, (g) provide a safe and orderly classroom, (h) foster a convivial atmosphere, (i) make the best motivational use of tests and grades, and (j) provide feedback in positive corrective ways.

In an attempt to identify dimensions of effective teaching, various educational structures have also shown interest. *Pathwise, a framework for teaching*, for example, has suggested four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Witcher et al., 2001). According to Thompson (cited in Campbell et al., 2004) “the relationship between beliefs and practice is not a simple one-way relationship from belief to practice, but a dynamic relationship in which beliefs are influenced by practical experience” (p. 50). All the participants had strong views about what constitutes good versus bad teachers, and that the two are by no means mirror images of one another:

More verb-referent statements about emotional climate, care about students, interaction with students, learning activities, discussion, and teacher or student questions were reported for effective teachers than for ineffective teachers. Further, there was some evidence for more focus on tests, feedback, grades, assignment, and homework when participants described their worst teachers (p. 47).

Kinney (1992, cited in Graig, 1994) found that pupils perceived the effective teacher as a warm, friendly, and supportive person who communicated clearly, motivated and disciplined students effectively, and was flexible in methodology. Although there seem to be universal general principles of effective teaching used to specify an effective teacher, the foreign and second language teaching presents learning objectives, tasks, and environments that are qualitatively distinct from those of other subjects. So, when defining the term ‘characteristics of effective language teacher’, it is necessary to take this context into consideration.

According to Nunan (1999), to be effective, language teachers need these two kinds of knowledge equally. He further states that declarative knowledge includes all of the things teachers know and can articulate. On the other hand, procedural knowledge includes the ability to do things or knowing how to do things, such as being able to carry on conversations in English, knowing how to plan lessons and knowing how to conduct pair work. For the most part, good, great and exceptional teachers have a number of personal characteristics in common and have finely learned classroom management skills, or, as Brown and Rodgers (2002) rightly state, “teaching, like medical practice, seems to have two components a mechanical component and a mental component” (p.116). They mention that to be a good teacher in an EFL class requires a combination of mechanical and mental components. The mechanical component of a lesson includes the skills required for the content of the lesson to be presented in the most accessible ways for students, while the mental component encompasses the teacher’s belief system about teaching and learning as well as the teacher’s personality. Both are equally important, can be developed over time and “relate to such dimensions of teaching as the role of the teacher, effective teaching practices, and teacher-student relations” (Pajares, 1992, cited in Brown & Rodgers, 2002, p.152).

Teacher quality is an important input in student achievement although identifying the qualities of teachers is difficult without detailed panel data. Research in economic education finds that teacher knowledge is one factor affecting student learning. In addition, there is suggestive evidence that teacher attitudes also matter (Marlin, 1999; cited in Kelly, 2012). According to Biggs and Moore (1993), qualified teachers and their rich experiential knowledge allow them to draw on an extensive repertoire of strategies, routines and powerful schemata to improvise both in planning and in interactive teaching and to solve classroom problems as they arise. They know the relevance of the topic they are focusing on to other topics in the curriculum, and their streamlined procedures for managing the class allow them to allocate their attention to other relevant aspects of the teaching and learning process, such as student performance. Some outstanding qualities include:

ü Successful teachers expect their students to succeed and have clear objectives

- ü Successful teachers have a sense of purpose and effective Classroom Management Style
- ü Successful teachers know when to listen to students and when to ignore them
- ü Successful teachers have a positive attitude, they are friendly and congenial and motivate learners
- ü Successful teachers use praise smartly and authentically and anticipate reward
- ü Successful teachers know how to take risks, encourage students to risk taking and challenge their students
- ü Successful teachers have willingness to put in the necessary time and enjoy their work
- ü Successful teachers adapt to student needs, know how to give feedback and have a sense of humor
- ü Successful teachers welcome change in the classroom and have capacity for growth
- ü Successful teachers never stop learning

Proficiency is an important factor for every teacher. You as an English teacher cannot be a good teacher if you do not spell, pronounce and make sentences correctly (Isman & Dabaj, 2004; cited in Wichadee, 2010). Patience and creativity are very important. If teacher keeps teaching in the same method over and over, it gets boring. Also, teachers should always speak English in class although sometimes students might not understand. Thus, when teachers find some comprehension problems in students, it is better to clarify and explain the subject and shift the language to students' mother tongue.

Motivation is also a very important factor. If students see how learning English will help them in everyday life, they will want to learn it (for instance, telling them to surf the net for articles that are mostly available in English, or giving them English movies to watch or English books to read.) Also, teachers have to be energetic so that their classes do not become boring; and they need to try to have a friendly relationship with students. They are more likely to listen to the teacher if the teacher is friendly and nice (Kumaravadivelu, 1992).

Research from general education characterizes the expert teacher as having superior cognition and knowledge structures (Ethel & McMeniman, 2000). An expert teacher has:

- ü Large, highly organized knowledge bases with complex interconnected schemas which are easily accessed
- ü Sets of basic automated skills, or routines, which are executed smoothly and apparently effortlessly
- ü Well-developed but flexible and adaptive sets of strategic knowledge which are used for planning.

Expert teachers work towards their pedagogical goals, evaluating and monitoring their actions. Their conceptual knowledge includes detailed knowledge of the subject matter, how it is to be taught, how to manage the classroom, and how to deal effectively with matters such as explaining a particular learning difficulty in ways that best suit students at particular stages of their learning (Biggs & Moore, 1993). From the perspective of students, Brown and McIntyre (1989) and Batten et al (1993) found that the two qualities with highest frequency of mention were the teacher's ability to 'explain clearly so that the [students] could understand', and 'help us with our work'. However, the ability to explain clearly appeared to be of peripheral importance to teachers – possibly because it is a deeply embedded and tacit aspect of teacher's craft knowledge.

Teachers have an important role in education; therefore studying about teacher characteristics and what makes a teacher an effective teacher has been a concern of some researchers. Clark (1995) presented many qualities of effective teachers he got from his research using student evaluations, trained observers in classrooms, verbal reports by teachers and students, and the training of teachers in specific teaching skills. First, effective teachers should communicate their own knowledge and appreciation of the subject matter to make students feel that they have learned something valuable, and that the course has contributed to their knowledge, awareness, and intellectual curiosity. Students should also be intellectually challenged and stimulated to think for themselves, and have opportunities to develop competencies characteristic of the discipline. Second, effective teachers should carefully plan and organize the lesson in a coherent manner. The next quality related to cognitive aspects of effective teaching involves techniques that are used to explain concepts and principles clearly, so that students understand the individual thoughts and ideas being presented. Another quality that contributes substantially to the achievement of cognitive learning concerns voice

and other characteristics associated with the quality of presentation by a teacher (e.g., speaking in a clear way, being well-paced, having an expressive manner, and using appropriate teaching aids effectively).

In another study Arikan, et al. (2008) aimed to gather data on how Turkish students learning English as a foreign language describe the qualities of an effective English teacher. Their results suggested that students perceive teachers as effective, if they teach both formal and informal English, incorporate games into teaching, and organize group/pair work activities in the classroom. In the same vein, Thomas and Montgomery (1998) investigated grades 2, 3, 4, 5 students' views on the quality of teaching. They did interviews, and used personal journals and reflective notes as data collection instruments. Students mentioned four dimensions of good teaching as caring, understanding, fun and loving. What is interesting about these results is that all these dimensions relate to the affective characteristics. Moreover, Yilmaz (2011), in another study, explored the perceptions of pre-service teachers enrolled in various majors at a Turkish university. His findings revealed that the majority of the participants expressed preference for warm, kind, sincere, friendly, sociable and familiar teachers who were enthusiastic, excited about teaching, dynamic, and motivating.

To meet the objectives of the study, the following research question was asked:

Are there any significant differences in male vs. female students' perceptions about the characteristics of effective English language teachers?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study included 60 EFL students, majoring in teaching English Language and translation, who have been selected from among a population of 120 students randomly. The sample consisted of 28 female and 32 male students. They were in the age range of 20 to 34 years old. Their first language was Azari Turkish and they have been studying English for three years in Tabriz Islamic Azad University.

Instrumentation

The main concern of the present study was to find out the qualities of an effective English language teacher from the male and female English language students' point of view. For this purpose, the researchers used a researcher-made questionnaire developed in English, which was revised twice with the help of colleagues and peers before being used in a pilot study to investigate how different items functioned and to find out whether there was a need to revise, add or drop any item. With comments received after piloting, three items were added to each section and some items were removed from each section. This questionnaire (see appendix) had been adapted from an existing literacy survey (Park & Lee's, 2006) in accordance with the needs of the participants of the present study.

This questionnaire included two sections; the first section asked about the demographic information of the participants and the second section included 60 statements about the characteristics of an EELT (the internal consistency index of which, calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.945, and the participants were asked to express their comments based on a four-point (very important, important, somehow important and not very important) Likert Scale. They were asked to select the choice which would best represent their reactions to the statements.

The questionnaire has organized the teacher characteristics in four categories as follows: 1) English proficiency, 2) Pedagogical knowledge, 3) Organization and communication skills, and 4) Socio-affective skills shown in the form of a four-point rating scale ranging from 'the most important' to 'not very important'. The last version of the questionnaire including 60

items was administered to the participants to sample their' beliefs and their self-reported ideas towards their attitude to teachers, learning and being in a classroom as direct participants.

Procedure

The first version of the questionnaire which has been designed by the researchers based on Park and Lee's concepts (2006) was administered to 20 students in the pilot study and based on their answers some items were modified or deleted. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated and showed an acceptable index. Then the revised questionnaire was administered to the main participants who were 28 female and 32 male students majoring in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and translation at English language department of Azad University of Tabriz.

The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the spring semester of the academic year 2015-2016, and the students had 20 minutes to complete. They were told that there were no right or wrong answers and that they just had to answer the questions according to what they really thought. Also, they could ask the researchers immediately if they had any questions. They were requested to indicate how important they thought a particular characteristic is in relation to effective teachers. They were asked to categorize the degree of the importance of each item as very important, important, somehow important or of not very important. The questionnaire was answered by both male and female students. The data were analyzed using percentage, frequency and Mann-Whitney U-Test.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of the Results

To analyze and answer the question, the researcher first ran the Kolmogrov-Smirnov test of normality, the results of which are presented in the table 4.1.

Table 1
Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Organization and communication skills	.130	60	.014	.929	60	.002
Pedagogical knowledge	.147	60	.003	.927	60	.001
Socio_affective_skills	.135	60	.009	.918	60	.001
English proficiency	.105	60	.099	.937	60	.004
Total score	.128	60	.016	.910	60	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

As it is seen in above table, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk test as indicate that the data for all of the variables doesn't meet the normality condition (sig <0.05). So for comparison of male and female students' point of view regarding an effective teacher, we could not use T-test. But some non-parametric tests such as Mann-Whitney U-test could be used.

Table 2

Ranks and Test Statistics for the Comparison of Male and Female Students' Perceptions

Variables	Sex	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Sig
Organization and Communication skills	Female	28	31.75	889.00	-.521	0.602
	Male	32	29.41	941.00		
	Total	60				
Pedagogical knowledge	Female	28	32.13	899.50	-.677	0.498
	Male	32	29.08	930.50		
	Total	60				
Socio-affective skills	Female	28	32.41	907.50	-.796	0.426
	Male	32	28.83	922.50		
	Total	60				
English proficiency	Female	28	32.96	923.00	-1.026	0.305
	Male	32	28.34	907.00		
	Total	60				
Total score	Female	28	32.54	911.00	-.846	0.398
	Male	32	28.72	919.00		
	Total	60				

As the results of Mann-Whitney U-test indicate for all of the five categories the p-values are higher than 0.05 ($P > 0.05$), which means that there is not any significant difference between the male and female students' point of view regarding an effective teacher. Table 4.1 also shows that female students rated the four categories from the most to the least important as follows: English proficiency, socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge and organization and communication skills. However, male students placed the four categories in the following order: organization and communication skills, pedagogical knowledge, socio-affective skills and English proficiency.

The overall mean score of the female students' perceptions on characteristics of effective teachers was a little bit higher than male students'. The perceptions of both groups were at a high level ($\bar{x} = 32.54$, $\bar{x} = 28.72$). Based on the results obtained from the application of the U-Mann-Whitney test, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference in the overall perceptions and in all categories between the two groups (male and female). This means that the male and female students were not different in their opinions towards characteristics of effective teachers. Therefore, the answer to the research question of this study is negative.

Therefore, our research hypothesis indicating that students with different genders have different perceptions about the characteristics of effective teachers was rejected, because according to the results learners 'gender did not affect their perceptions regarding the qualities of an effective teacher.

Discussion

This study investigated the view points of male and female English language students about the effective characteristics of EFL teachers. As the findings show, learners of English hold different views toward different characteristics of an effective English language teacher.

On the whole, the learners assigned more weight to the characteristics relating to teachers' personality and the way they behave their students. Moreover, students consider these features such as: the ability to develop proper relationships with students, ability to build students' confidence, ability to maintain discipline in the classroom, listen to students' points of view and opinions and let them express themselves, promote communicative language learning through activities and discussion, ability to make courses interesting and being smart to deviate attention of students from everything else to the topic, be approachable and friendly, as the important characteristics of an effective teacher.

In the present study, it has been revealed that students expect a good English teacher to have the ability to develop proper relationships with students, ability to build students' confidence, ability to maintain discipline in the classroom, and ability to create an entertaining atmosphere to carry out the class activities. Regarding the emphasis of the teachers on target language knowledge, teacher education programs should invest more than what they previously did on improving teachers' English proficiency if they are to contribute to the process of training effective teachers. As teachers are the main source of language available to students, their richer knowledge of and better proficiency in the language can help learners overcome their difficulties in communicative skills, too.

Our findings indicating no difference between the perceptions of male and female students regarding the effective language teacher, are in line with Feldman ' (1992) research on college students' preconceptions of college teachers. He noticed that in the majority of studies, male and female students' global evaluations of college teachers as professionals were not different. A year later, he published the second part of his review stating that an average association between the gender of the students and overall evaluation, while favoring females, was too trivial in size to be significant in practical terms (Feldman, 1993). Our findings partly confirm his review.

If we can make our classrooms places that students enjoy coming because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, where the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and where the atmosphere is supportive and non threatening, we can make a positive contribution to students' motivation to learn.

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APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

IN GOD WE TRUST

A Questionnaire on Qualities of an Effective English Language Teacher

This questionnaire is going to be used to investigate the qualities of an effective English language teacher from the perspective of Iranian English language learners. Findings of this study are hoped to be beneficial to both Iranian English language teachers and learners. It is worth mentioning that your participation in this research is voluntary and the data collected by means of this questionnaire will be kept confidential. Should you wish to contact the researcher during the process of research, please feel free to contact her through the following e-mail address: roya4c@gmail.com

Thank you for your participation

QUESTIONNAIRE: Characteristics of an Effective English Language Teacher (EELT)

Name (Optional): Age : Course : Date:

Sex: Male Female Email:

Instruction: With reference to each statement, please tick *ONLY ONE BOX* (according to how important they are) that reflects your perceptions and views regarding some qualities of a good English language teacher.

Direction: listed below are the means of each statement in questionnaire:

- Ø 4= Very important
- Ø 3= Important
- Ø 2=Somehow
- Ø 1= Not very important

After reading each statement checks the number (1, 2, 3, 4,) that applies to you. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to the statements. (See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire, Appendix B for a list of open-ended questions).

Table 1. Percentage scores of students' perceptions on characteristics of effective English language teachers in terms of organization & communication skill

No of item	Organization and communication skills	Very important 4	Important 3	Somehow important 2	Not Very important 1
1	Ability to guide and train students towards independent learning				
2	Use easy language to aid student understanding				
3	Ability to make courses interesting and being smart to deviate attention of students from everything else to the topic				
4	Ability to plan the lessons clearly and also state the objectives of the lesson clearly				
5	Encourage students to use the English language ALL THE TIME in class				
6	Stress the most important points and providing detailed explanations while reading/listening (e.g,checking ALL the new vocabularies)				
7	Ability to analyze students' needs				
8	Ability to make/ stimulate students to interact/communicate with each other				
9	Good communication skills				
10	Ability to prepare appropriate material				
11	Prepare the lesson well and using class time wisely				
12	Using the students' native language when necessary				
13	Maintain good classroom atmosphere using authority, if necessary				
14	Provide opportunities to use English through meaningful tasks and activities				
15	Be helpful to students in and outside the classroom				

Table 2.Percentage scores of students' perceptions on characteristics of effective English language teachers in terms of pedagogical knowledge

No of items	Pedagogical knowledge	Very important 4	Important 3	Somehow important 2	Not Very important 1
1	Focus on learning outcomes and growth, not content taught				
2	Use various materials including video, audio, and multimedia				
3	Promote communicative language learning through activities & discussion				
4	Be flexible with grading				
5	Motivate students by supporting their self-efficacy				
6	Assess what students have learned rationally				
7	Develop students' language skill through working in pairs or groups				
8	Let students have some control over the learning process				
9	Encourage the students to learn English outside the classroom				
10	Avoid direct criticism of students when they make errors				
11	Praise students for good ideas or for their effort				
12	Teach subject matter in ways that are accessible to all learners and vary his/her delivery methods if necessary				

14	Ability to explain vocabulary and grammar and use relevant real world examples in lessons				
15	Ability to set tasks with clear outcomes				



Table3. Percentage scores of students' perceptions on characteristics of effective English language teachers in terms of socio-affective skills

No of items	socio-affective skills	Very important 4	Important 3	Somehow important 2	Not Very important 1
1	Have an interest in students, for example, address individual students by name				
2	Be neat and tidy in appearance				
3	Ability to make courses interesting and motivate students				
4	Alleviate students' anxiety in class				
5	Listen to students' points of view and opinions and let them express themselves				
6	Be approachable and friendly				
7	Be patient				
8	Treat students fairly and equally				
9	Be punctual				
10	Have a good sense of humor				
11	Ability to develop proper relationships with students				
12	Ability to build students' confidence				
13	Not lose temper and get angry				
14	Be flexible and open to criticism				

15	Be polite and respect the personality of the students				
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No of Items	English proficiency	Very important 4	Important 3	Somehow important 2	Not Very important 1
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Table 4.Percentage scores of students' perceptions on characteristics of effective English language teachers in terms of English proficiency

1	Read, write, speak, and understand spoken English well				
2	Know English vocabulary well				
3	Have good knowledge of English grammar				
4	Possess extensive culture Comprehension and provide cultural information about the target language's culture				
5	Have correct accent and pronunciation				
6	Ability to be flexible and vary techniques according to students' level and the teaching/learning situations				
7	Emphasis error correction				
8	Ability to assess students' performance with the help of suitable evaluation instruments				
9	Ability to use audio-visual aids when teaching				
10	Ability to create an entertaining atmosphere to carry out the class activities				
11	Ability to maintain discipline in the classroom				
12	Ability to have pair work and group work activities in the classroom				
13	Ability to make the subject of the lesson interesting to learners				
14	Ability to help the learners become autonomous learners				
15	Give the learners some control and decision-making over what they do				

Biodata

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