

## COMPARING PERCEPTIONS ON CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY TEACHERS AND FUTURE TEACHERS FOR SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA

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### Abstract

This article compares the characteristics of quality teachers against the characteristics of future teachers for Malaysia. This study aimed to examine the expectation and preferences towards school teachers. A survey was conducted with 74 first year students who were pursuing Bachelor of Design degree programmes in a Malaysian public university which afforded them to provide meaningful insights in accordance to current social and culture trend in Malaysia. In the survey, the respondents listed down three main characteristics of quality teacher and three main characteristics of future teachers for Malaysia. The data were sorted and coded to form four themes, which were attitudes to teaching profession, attitudes to students, teachers' knowledge and physical appearance. The themes were compared to identify common and different characteristics between quality teachers and future teachers. The results showed that most of the respondents concerned about teachers' attitudes to teaching profession. A majority of the preferred characteristics were found common between quality teachers and future teachers. The respondents generally expected quality teachers as constantly knowledgeable pretty ladies or handsome men who are sporting, dedicated, open-minded, responsible and punctual at work. Majority of the respondents demarcated the characteristics of quality teachers and future teachers for Malaysia. This phenomenon indicated that the perceived quality of present teachers may not fit for the future. Thus, the concept of quality teachers should be updated from time to time, leading to the constant need to research and keep abreast with the latest teacher education model.

**Keywords** *Quality teachers, future teachers, perceived characteristics, Malaysian teachers.*

### Abstrak

Artikel ini membandingkan ciri-ciri guru berkualiti dengan ciri-ciri guru masa depan Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti jangkaan dan pilihan terhadap guru sekolah. Satu soal selidik telah dibuat melibatkan 74 pelajar tahun pertama yang mengikuti program ijazah sarjana muda reka bentuk dalam di sebuah universiti awam Malaysia yang membolehkan mereka

memberi pandangan yang selaras dengan trend sosial dan budaya semasa di Malaysia. Dalam soal selidik ini, responden senaraikan tiga ciri utama guru berkualiti dan tiga ciri utama guru masa depan untuk Malaysia. Data diatur dan dikodkan bagi membentuk empat tema, iaitu sikap terhadap profesion mengajar, sikap terhadap pelajar, pengetahuan guru, dan penampilan fizikal. Tema ini dibandingkan demi mengenal pasti ciri-ciri yang lazim dan berbeza antara guru berkualiti dengan guru masa depan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan responden mengambil berat tentang sikap guru terhadap profesion mengajar. Sebahagian besar ciri pilihan antara guru berkualiti dan guru masa depan didapati sama. Responden secara umumnya menjangkakan guru berkualiti sebagai wanita cantik atau lelaki kacak berpengetahuan yang sporting, berdedikasi, berfikiran terbuka, bertanggungjawab dan menepati masa di tempat kerja. Majoriti responden mengasingkan ciri guru berkualiti dan guru masa depan. Fenomena ini menunjukkan bahawa kualiti guru yang dirasakan kini mungkin tidak sesuai untuk masa depan. Oleh itu, konsep guru berkualiti harus dikemas kini dari masa ke semasa, membawa kepada keperluan yang berterusan untuk mengaji dan mengikuti model pendidikan guru yang terkini.

**Kata kunci** *Guru Berkualiti, Guru Masa Depan, Ciri yang Dirasakan, Guru Malaysia.*

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers have been regarded as engineers of human soul, particularly in oriental cultures. However, this proposition began to receive criticism for its utilitarian basis—treating educated human beings as outcomes of structured and systematic production (Ja, 2013; Liu, 2010). In any case, quality teachers are certainly the key to educational excellence and this is true across different disciplines, cultures and countries (Agezo, 2009; Ingvarson et al., 2014). As discovered by Darling-Hammond (2000), the preparation and certification of teachers indicated the strongest correlation to students' achievement in mathematics and reading. Yet, certification alone is neither an effective nor efficient way to guarantee teaching proficiency and competency (Abell Foundation, 2001). Thus, the means of preparing teachers is the utmost important matter for nurturing quality teachers. This in turn leads to the question of what kind the characteristics a quality teacher should have. This is indeed a fundamental question ought to be answered in every teacher education programme.

Since different education systems would require different quality of teachers to achieve specific national agenda for development, it is necessary to update the expected quality of teachers for a nation whenever the education system in that particular nation evolves. In other words, there is a constant need to keep track of the changing expectation of various stakeholders in an education system towards the quality of teachers. As stated by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE, 2012), an education systems should involve five types of stakeholders, namely education administrators, education service administrators, teachers, students and parents. This study considers students as the most important stakeholder in the education system, especially when

the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2012) attempts to “ensure the delivery of effective student-centred and differentiated teaching and learning in every classroom” in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 - 2025.

This study holds that quality teachers are teachers who demonstrate excellent standard of teachers as measured against non-performing teachers. As for future teachers, the future is a period of time following the moment of this study was carried out, which mean the future teachers could be now or any point of time from now. In a study conducted by the Higher Education Leadership Academy, researchers revealed that half of the lessons (out of 125) in 41 randomly selected schools across Malaysia did not meet satisfactory standards (MOE, 2012). Most of the lessons were teacher-centred and failed to engage students, in which teachers generally focused on “achieving surface-level content understanding for summative assessment purposes, rather than on cultivating higher-order thinking skills” (MOE, 2012). This alarming phenomenon signifies an urgent need for Malaysia to improve the quality of in-service teachers, while equipping pre-service teachers with the necessary values, knowledge and skills to conduct satisfactory and engaging lessons. In Malaysia, registered teachers are any teachers who have registered themselves under the Education Act 1996. This act, also known as Act 550, defines teacher as a person who teaches pupils in an education institution or a person who prepares or produces learning materials or examines answer scripts returned to, for or through distance education centre.

At early childhood level, Colker (2008) found twelve characteristics of effective teachers and ranked them according to their importance: 1) passion, 2) perseverance, 3) willingness to take risk, 4) pragmatism, 5) patience, 6) flexibility, 7) respect, 8) creativity, 9) authenticity, 10), love of learning, 11) high energy, and 12) sense of humour. As for educating future effective teachers, Da Ros-Voseles and Moss (2007) proposed five dispositions, which are empathy, positive view of others, positive view of self, authenticity, and meaningful purpose and vision.

The lack of empirical studies on student or pupil perception of the quality of teacher began to capture attention of educationalists since 2001. Hubbard (2001) accused educators and researchers for being hesitant to approach students in a serious conversation about their perception of teachers’ performance and behaviours in the classroom. This argument was supported by Sutcliff (2011) who believed that studies on teacher quality should include “measurements of student preferences for classroom learning environments and experiences as well as assessment of student goals, motivation, self-esteem and self-efficacy.” In fact, Springer, Morganfield and Diffily (2007) discovered that the preference for classroom environments of students and teachers differed greatly. Among the students, significant differences of perception and preferences were revealed in terms of gender (Slavin, 2006), ethnicity (Howard, 2002) and culture (Garcia, Agbemakplido, Abdella, Lopez, & Registe, 2006; Noguera, 2007)

In Malaysia, a survey was carried out by the National Higher Education Research institute, in which 766 primary school students and 2,011 secondary school students were selected from schools in 14 states of Malaysia to respond to a questionnaire that consisted of six constructs—teaching methods, student involvement, classroom management, personality, caring attitude and communication skills, practices and efforts (MOHE, 2012). The study concluded that more than 72% primary school

respondents agreed upon all six constructs; while more than 71% of the secondary school respondents agreed upon two constructs, which were teacher's personality and caring attitude. Although the reliability and the validity of data collection instruments were assured through pilot study (overall Cronbach's Alpha = .88), the scope of constructed was set from researchers' perspective rather than students' perspective. In other words, whether the characteristics of quality teachers for now and future actually reflect what they have in mind or not is still questionable.

## **OBJECTIVE**

This study aims to explore and examine the perception of Malaysian undergraduate students who had completed primary and secondary education upon the characteristics of quality teachers and future teachers for Malaysia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data was collected through qualitative exploratory survey research design (Saldana, 2011). Respondents were selected by using purposive sampling. The participants of the survey were first year undergraduate students of a public university in Malaysia, who pursued a Bachelor of Design in Advertising (n=36) or Bachelor of Design in Animation (n=38). The majority of the respondents were female (46 out of 74) and Malay (64 out of 74). These 74 students were recruited on purpose because the programmes they were pursuing constantly require them to understand the trend and expectation of Malaysian teenagers. In other words, the respondents would provide meaningful insights on what teenage school students expect and prefer in accordance to current social and cultural trend in Malaysia.

During the data collection session, the respondents were gathered in a lecture hall to answer the two open questions: 1) what are the three main characteristics of quality teachers for Malaysia? and 2) what are the three main characteristics of future teachers for Malaysia? This study collected only three main characteristics because it intended to reveal and capture prioritized perception at visceral level of brain processing (see Norman, 2004) rather than the reflective level of brain processing. In other words, the respondents were directed to write down three ideas or concepts appeared in their mind when referring to quality teacher and then future teachers for schools in Malaysia. The answers collected from the study were sorted and coded to form themes (Creswell, 2003). The themes emerged from the answers were delineated into three sets of data, which are perceived characteristics of quality teachers, perceived characteristics of future teachers and common characteristics between quality teachers and future teachers.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Through the first question, 216 units of characteristics were gathered, resulting 133 unique items which depicts the perceived characteristics of quality teachers. As for future teachers, 219 units of characteristics were collected through the second question, resulting 143 unique items. Between two types of characteristics, 44 items were found

intersecting, as shown in Table 1. In terms of ranking, being punctual (sum=22; Q=14 & F=8), sporting (sum=15; Q=4 & F=11) and responsible (sum=14; Q=8 & F=6) are the top three common characteristics. Both knowledgeable and pretty or handsome were ranked fourth; while dedicated and open-minded were ranked fifth. In a word, the respondents expected quality teachers for now and future as knowledgeable pretty ladies or handsome men who are sporting, dedicated, open-minded, responsible and punctual at work.

**Table 1:** *Perceived common characteristics between quality teachers (Q) and future teachers (F) (f: frequency).*

Rank	Common Characteristics	f		Rank	Common Characteristics	f	
		Q	F			Q	F
1	Punctual	14	8	10	Experienced	3	1
2	Sporting	4	11	10	Tidy looking	3	1
3	Responsible	8	6	10	Tolerant	2	2
4	Pretty / handsome	7	5	10	Friendly	2	2
4	knowledgeable	6	6	10	Understanding students' feeling	1	3
5	Dedicated	8	2	10	Hardworking	1	3
5	Open-minded	2	8	11	Sociable	2	1
6	Understanding students;	6	3	11	Attractive personality	2	1
6	Disciplined	6	3	11	Well-dressed	2	1
6	Visionary	2	7	11	Befriend with students	2	1
7	Have sense of humour	7	1	11	Intelligent	2	1
7	Smart	5	3	11	Technology savvy	1	2
7	Caring and loving	5	3	11	IT / ICT savvy	1	2
8	Strict	5	1	11	Positive / positive thinking	1	2
8	Smart in capturing students' attention	4	2	11	Not fierce / Not too fierce	1	2
8	Professional	3	3	12	Student-friendly	1	1
8	Caliber	1	5	12	Cute	1	1
9	Care for students	4	1	12	Thoughtful	1	1
9	Smart in touching students' heart	4	1	12			
9	Attractive	1	4	12	Creative in teaching	1	1
9	Patient	3	2	12	Always provide guidance	1	1
9	Tidy	3	2	12	Understand every student's issue	1	1
10	Committed	3	1	12	Smart in controlling situation	1	1

The majority of teachers in Malaysia are Malay, who are employed as government servants. As perceived by foreigners, “the Malay ethnic group holds the majority of the government offices; people in this group tend to be more flexible regarding time” (Martin & Chaney, 2009, p.175). However, “punctuality is very important in the Malay culture” (Martin & Chaney, 2009) and this was reinforced by the respondents who demanded teachers to be punctual in teaching, in particular, they expect teachers to start and end lessons on time.

In the contexts of teaching, students would expect sporting teachers to be fair and generous in treating students, especially in competitive classroom activities, such as games, quizzes, tests or examinations which involve norm-referenced assessment that measures a learner’s achievements by comparing to other learners (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2004).

Being responsible in carrying out duties at work was perceived as a highly prioritized virtue of teachers in this study. In terms of the types of teachers’ responsibility, the Teacher Education Philosophy stated that, teachers in Malaysia are expected to “uphold the aspirations of the nation, cherishes the national cultural heritage, [and] ensures the development of the individual and the preservation of a united, democratic, progressive and discipline society” (MOE, 1982, p.14).

Further data sorting were carried out to synthesize similar and relevant items of teacher characteristics (see Table 2). Nearly half of the respondents’ perceptions of quality teacher were connected to teachers’ attitudes to teaching profession (sum=205; 47% of total items). The weightage of importance on teachers’ attitudes to students (sum=91; 21% of total items) was similar to teachers’ knowledge (sum=87; 20% of total items).

In terms of teachers’ knowledge, pedagogical knowledge received the most attention from the respondents (sum=48; 55% of 87 items), as compared to content knowledge (sum=29; 33% of 87 items) and technological knowledge (sum=10; 11% of 87 items). If the view of students were taken into consideration, the amount of knowledge, which can be operationalized in the form of credit hours in teacher education programmes, could be structured as according to the 55:33:11 ratios. This in turn could be expanded to fill in the knowledge gap found in the framework for teacher knowledge proposed by Mishra and Koehler (2006), specifically in answering how to divide the amount of knowledge in the Technological, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) framework.

Meanwhile, the respondents demonstrated the least about the physical appearance of teachers (sum=52; 12% of total items). Despite being the least mentioned characteristics of quality teachers, such perception is parallel to the interests of Dunbar and Segrin (2012) who examined the relationship between clothing and teacher credibility using Expectancy Violations Theory.

**Table 2:** *Categories of items revealed through data sorting.*

	Teachers	Attitudes to		Knowledge	Physical appearance	Total items
		profession	students			
Advertising (n=36)	Quality	51	29	9	15	104
	Future	60	14	25	14	113
Animation (n=38)	Quality	46	31	24	11	112
	Future	48	17	29	12	106
	Total items	205	91	87	52	435

***Perceived Teachers’ Attitudes towards Teaching Profession***

Forty-five items were found from 67 respondents (67 out of 74) related to teachers’ attitudes towards teaching profession. Eleven items are exclusive characteristics of quality teachers, twelve items are meant for future teachers, while the rest are common characteristics (22 out of 45). It is apparent that there are more common characteristics than either characteristics of quality teachers or future teachers. In other words, a majority of teachers’ attitudes towards teaching profession are inexhaustible and can stand the test of time. In general, the respondents expected teachers to be punctual in teaching (sum=23; Q=14; F=9), responsible in carrying out duties (sum=17; Q=10 & F=7), sporting (sum=15; Q=5 & F=11), disciplined (sum=11; Q=7; F=4), open-minded and visionary (sum=11; Q=2 & F=9). When contrasting quality teachers against future teachers, the respondents expected quality teachers to be passionate, polite and moral now, but expected future teachers to be goal-oriented, motivated and ready to face various challenges and piles of work, while having typical educator’s soul with integrity.

***Perceived Teachers’ Attitudes towards Students***

Twenty-four items were found from 48 respondents (48 out of 74) related to teachers’ attitudes towards students. Eight items are exclusive characteristics of quality teachers, six items are meant for future teachers, while the rest are common characteristics (10 out of 24). In general, the respondents wished teachers could be friendly (sum=18; Q=10; F=8), caring and loving (sum=14; Q=10 & F=4), kind (sum=8; Q=7 & F=1) but strict at the right place (sum=7; Q=6; F=1). They also favoured teachers who are smart in capturing students’ attention (sum=7; Q=5 & F=2), fair to all students (sum=5; Q=4; F=1) and not easy to get angry with students’ negative behaviours (sum=4; Q=1; F=3). In particular, the respondents wanted quality teachers to be strict but not too pressuring on students, preferably showing sweet smiling when teaching and guiding students towards success. This finding is supported by Corbett and Wilson (2002), as they claimed that students generally preferred teachers who can push students to finish homework or assignment. As for future teachers, the respondents expected them to be capable of improving students’ performance while being a role model to students. In a word, teachers’ personality means a lot when dealing with students because this could portray whether a teacher is of quality or not in the eyes of his or her students.

### ***Pedagogical Knowledge Possessed by Teachers***

Thirty-nine items related to the perceived pedagogical knowledge of teachers were recognised through 30 respondents (30 out of 74), in which 22 items were grouped under teaching competency, nine items under language competency and eight items under classroom management. In terms of teaching competency, most of perceived characteristics were related to future teachers (F=11), as opposed to quality teachers (Q=8) and common characteristics (3 items). This could mean the respondents put higher expectation towards future teachers, anticipating them to acquire more pedagogical knowledge when facing upcoming challenges. In specific, the respondents expected teachers in the future to be creative and innovative (F=7), versatile (F=3) and keeping abreast with current teaching approaches (F=2). In general, the respondents preferred teachers to be creative in teaching (sum=10; Q=6; F=4), while being smart in capturing students' attention in teaching. They also wanted both quality and future teachers who have past teaching experience.

In terms of language competency, two common characteristics were found, which were smart in touching students' heart (sum=4; Q=3; F=1), and skillful in communication with students (sum=3; Q=1; F=2). As for now, the respondents preferred quality teachers who can converse in fluent English in front of students. In the future, they expected teachers to be fluent in multiple languages (F=3). The English language proficiency and the multi-lingual competency seem to support the vision and mission set in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 by the Ministry of Education. In specific the Ministry will "ensure every child is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English Language", while encouraging "every child to learn an additional language by 2025" (MOE, 2012, p. E-12).

As for classroom management, most of the items (5 out of 8) were mentioned for quality teachers. This reflected that knowledge of classroom management has always been an indicator for quality teacher. In particular, the respondents wished to have teachers who are always sensitive with current conditions and students' behaviours in the classroom. In other words, quality teachers should be smart in controlling their students' behaviours, their personal emotion and other teaching conditions, that is handling issues and solving problems in order to make a class interesting. The need for teachers to master classroom management has been echoed by many academics, in which they maintained enthusiasm in proposing classroom management strategies across decades (e.g. Evrtson & Weinstein, 2011; Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003; Marzano, Simms, Roy, Heflebower, & Warrick, 2013). Nevertheless, as the educational technology evolves and affords real-time distance education, the attention ought to be focused on virtual or online classroom management.

### ***Content Knowledge Possessed by Teachers***

Eighteen items related to the perceived content knowledge of teachers were identified from 28 respondents (28 out of 74), in which eight items were categorized as content knowledge in subject matter contexts, while ten items were content knowledge in paratext of subject matter. Paratext or surround is considered as materials related to a subject matter but not as a part or a component of the subject matter (Walsh & Apperley, 2012). Typical paratextual materials are dedicated website, online forum, blog, learning guide book, etc. In general, the respondents expected teachers to be

knowledgeable (sum=12; Q=6; F=6) and educated (sum=4; Q=1; F=3). When contrasting quality teachers and future teachers, the respondents expected quality teachers to point out students' mistakes, that is providing feedback using subject matter knowledge in teaching; while they expected future teachers to possess high quality of education background and very high score of intelligence quotient (IQ).

In the paratext of subject matter, the respondents expected teachers to be knowledgeable in multiple fields (sum=5; Q=1; F=4). In particular, Malaysian teachers in near future should have ideas about Vision 2020, while being knowledgeable in science, experienced and versatile in multiple fields and keeping abreast with current issues and surrounding conditions. Future teachers should also be capable to teach other subjects, to the extent where they can replace absent teachers.

### ***Technological Knowledge Possessed by Teachers***

Six items related to the perceived technological knowledge of teachers were recognised through nine respondents, in which three items were grouped as general technology while another three items were grouped as educational technology. The respondents expected teachers to be technology savvy (sum=3; Q=1; F=2), particularly in information and communication technology (ICT). Mastery of educational technology, especially when teaching in the classroom seemed to be a necessity for being a future teacher.

### ***Perceived Physical Appearance of Teachers***

Thirteen items were identified from 27 respondents (male=10; female=17) as depicting the respondents' perception upon the physical appearance of quality teachers and future teachers. When the ethnicity of respondents was examined, almost all respondents who concerned about the physical appearance of teachers were Malay, except one female Sabahan. Four items are exclusive characteristics of future teachers, only one item (eye pleasing) is meant for quality teachers, while the rest are common characteristics (7 out of 13). In terms of physical appearance, most respondents expected quality teachers to be pretty or handsome (sum=12; Q=7 & F=5), tidy (sum=9; Q=6 & F=3) and smart (sum=9; Q=5 & F=4) throughout time, now and in the future. It was interesting that the respondents visualized future teachers as individuals who are visually sexy, young, driving luxury car and having a good materialistic life. In terms of gender differences, male respondents favoured tidy and pretty or handsome quality teachers, while expecting future teachers to be smart, hot, sexy and well-dressed. As for female respondents, quality teachers should be handsome or pretty, smart, tidy and attractive in appearance; and they preferred future teachers to be handsome, attractive, stylish and tidy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this survey suppose that most of the students concerned about teachers' attitudes to teaching profession, in which a majority of the preferred characteristics were shared between current and future teachers. In other words, the common characteristics of quality teachers and future teachers are inexhaustible and can stand the test of time. The students generally expected quality teachers as constantly knowledgeable pretty

ladies or handsome men who are sporting, dedicated, open-minded, responsible and punctual at work.

Teachers' attitudes to students and teachers' knowledge received similar level attention from the students. The students generally wished to have teachers who are friendly, caring and loving, kind, but strict at the right place. They also favoured teachers who are good at capturing students' attention in the classroom, fair to all students and not easy to get angry with students' negative behaviours.

As for teachers' knowledge, a student-centred teacher education programme should cover more pedagogical knowledge and technological knowledge as compared to present curriculum in public universities. In particular, quality teachers should be proficient in communication and English language skills, smart in controlling their students' behaviours, their personal emotion and other teaching conditions, that is handling issues and solving problems in order to make a class interesting. In terms of content knowledge, quality teachers must be knowledgeable and educated, and this should not limited to their filed of expertise. Apart from knowledge, the students also demanded quality teachers to have pretty or handsome, tidy and smart looking throughout time, now and in the future.

Most of the respondents delineated the characteristics between quality teachers and future teachers for Malaysia. This phenomenon indicated that the perceived quality teachers at the present time may not be fit for the future. In other words, the concept of quality teachers should be updated from time to time, leading to the constant need to research and keep abreast with the latest teacher education model.

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