Learners’ Perceptions of Characteristics of Effective Language Teachers

Language Matters Series
Texas Language Center
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Question

“\(I\) have an effective language teacher.”

What comes to mind?
Learners’ Perceptions

- The research on the effectiveness of language teachers has shown that students and teachers do not always agree about what makes for effective teaching (Horwitz, 1990; Kern, 1995; & Schultz, 2001).

- Oxford (2001), for example, argued that it is imperative that educators help students to self-explore their “best and worst” learning experiences in order for them better to understand and appreciate their own learning and to aid their teachers in learning about their students’ perceptions of their instructional effectiveness.
Effective Teaching

- Brophy and Good (1986) related good teaching to learners’ achievement.

- Berliner (1987) described good teachers as those who provide their learners with more academic learning time.

- Shulman (1987) coined the term *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK).

- Hamacheck (1999) distinguished between the two terms of *good teaching* and *effective teaching*.
Hammadu and Bernhardt (1987) discussed the unique art of being a foreign language teacher:

“Being a foreign language teacher is in many ways unique within the profession of teaching. Becoming a foreign language teacher, too, is a different process from that which other future teachers experience. This reality is rooted in the subject matter of the foreign language itself. In foreign language teaching, the content and the process for learning the content are the same. In other words, in foreign language teaching the medium is the message” (p. 301)
Purpose of the study

- Qualitative research study
- Explored Arabic language learners' perceptions
- Identified characteristics of effective and ineffective Arabic language teachers
- Investigated learners' motivation
Research Questions

1. What are students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective and ineffective language teachers in general and Arabic language teachers in particular?

2. How do motivational constructs relate to aspects of the participants’ conceptions of effective teaching?
Method

- Participants
- Measures and Procedure
  - Surveys and Interviews
- Methodological Approach
  - Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)
Excerpts

➢ Tamara (GS):
“I think you cannot really encourage your students to do their best if you don’t believe in their potential. If you don’t believe in students’ potential, then they can sense that, and they will live up to your (low) expectations”

➢ Edward (2 year):
“I just think like a hard course and intense. The teacher is like very non-materialistic, but like knows what they are doing and exhausting their students in a good way. Those teachers make your brain hurt when you leave the class, .....They make you get a good grasp of the language”
1. High Expectations

- Aware of their students' *optimal* proficiency level
- Believe in their students’ abilities
- Their courses are:
  - demanding
  - challenging
  - intense
Ethan (GS):

“I had a teacher who taught me a reading class. Usually we had a short story or a novel to read, about 100 pages in a weekend. That’s a lot. During the week, each night we have an article, maybe from a newspaper or a book to read, just a few pages. I thought the problem with that class was that the professor didn’t know how to choose texts that were appropriate for our level... We told him that, and he wasn’t sympathetic with our concerns”
2. Students' Learning Needs

Adaptable Teachers
- High Expectations
- Learners' Needs
- Balance
  - Learning Outcomes

- Sensitive to their students’ strengths and weaknesses
- Aware of their students’ *current* proficiency level
- Develop interesting and meaningful activities
Excerpt

- Lance (GS):
  “….. knowledge of teaching techniques…. Because it makes the tedious process of learning a language more fun and bearable”

- Bernice (GS):
  “The teaching of culture as a language skill ... comes through having significant (multiple years) of living experience in both the Arab world and the culture of their students”
Kelvin (3rd year):

“....So I think the *religious aspects* of the language and culture need to be tied in to get a better understanding of the language... Just simple things. Greetings: "peace be upon you," saying "God willing" in a conversation that reflects not being arrogant. *We wouldn’t say those things in English. So that definitely helped me to understand the culture’’"
3. Balance between High Expectations and Students’ Learning Needs

- **Teacher’s PK**
  - Organizational skills

- **Teacher’s CK**
  - Linguistic knowledge
    - MSA
    - Dialects
    - Pragmatics

- **Teacher’s PCK**
  - SLA theories &
  - FL teaching methods
  - Communication

- **Sensitivity to cultural gap**
  - Bicultural
    - TC & LC
  - Realistic
  - Dealing with reluctant learners
  - Language and religion
Excerpts

- **Lanna (2nd year):**
  “I would probably think that an [effective] teacher had made students speak a lot in class because I think there are other language classes in their language environments where students don’t speak that much, and to me that is one of the biggest measures of success. I know reading and writing are important, but I always like speaking”

- **Salina (3rd year):**
  “I mean effective means someone who helped me advance in a language, but I still don’t always understand why that happens”

- **Adel (4th year):**
  “The students are a mirror of how well the teacher is. So when you listen to the students speak and see how well they speak, write, and read, then you can say this was an effective teacher because they got what they were supposed to get across to them”
Lance (GS):

“I will imagine that students would be able to **do things with the language, to speak, write, and understand what they hear**... With an ineffective teacher, students can’t do what they need to do with the language”
4. Learners' Learning Outcomes

- Speaking / all levels
- Extend learners’ vocabulary/ 3rd & 4th levels
- Improvement in all language skills/ GS
Findings: Theme 1

An Effective language teacher is an Adaptable Teacher
Bernice (GS):

“This instructor has the animation and bubbly personality of a Saturday morning cartoon character. His love for the language and for teaching and care for his students is so constant and apparent that his students feed off his excitement. His energy is contagious. Students leave the class smiling, thinking about the class for the rest of the day. Such a proactive classroom environment encourages students to develop the desire to learn more about the subject since he makes certain to involve every student, which in turn establishes key language-learning skills within each individual student.”
Excerpts

Mariam (GS):

“My best Arabic teacher was enthusiastic, encouraging, and demanding. They found ways to pun with the target language, helping students to live in a space characterized by the target language despite their lack of fluency. They were aware of each student’s progress, encouraging and challenging each according to his or her needs”

Nadine (3rd year):

“The best teacher that motivated me to learn was very positive and she showed that she believed in my capability to learn Arabic and become a better learner. Her support and help in and outside of class really helped me to push myself to work harder in the class...”
Excerpts

David (GS):

“She was enthusiastic, energized, and committed to students’ success. The assignments were long and difficult, but I felt like she had put such a commitment into teaching me that if I failed to do the requisite work, I would be letting her down.”

Edward (2nd year):

“The best teacher that motivated me to learn Arabic did so by always being encouraging of my efforts. The teacher made me feel like she was genuinely interested in the progress I was making and appreciated my efforts, which encouraged me to spend all the time I did working on Arabic.”
Findings: Theme 2
Learners’ Best Language Learning Experiences

Adaptable Teacher

Best Learning experience

Teachers’ Positive Interaction Style

Caring ↔ Creative
Teacher’s Positive Interaction Style

- **Caring**
  - ENCOURAGING
  - Committed
  - Connected
  - Assures positive environment
  - Provides feedback
  - Seeks feedback

- **Creative**
  - Interactive presentation
  - Input
    - Meaningful tasks
    - Authentic application
Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1989) represented Flow as an experiential state characterized by intense focus and involvement that leads to improved performance on a task.
Conditions of Flow

1. A perceived balance of skills and challenges
2. Intense concentration
3. Positive feedback
4. A sense of control and autonomy
5. Great level of involvement
6. Time passes more quickly

Mariam (GS):

“The teacher cared about each student’s progress and well being, and strove to keep classes as interesting and varied as possible. They were aware of each student’s progress, encouraging and challenging each according to his or her needs. Classes always passed very quickly because we had so many exercises, but the variety and fast pace made class seem like a stimulating game”
Maha (4th year):

“He is a **challenging teacher**. He challenges you. He is a really good teacher and **sometimes frustrates me**, I mean he doesn’t frustrate me, but he gives you so much. Sometimes it seems overwhelming. He gives you a challenge and you have to rise up and meet it otherwise you don’t grow and not get a good grade……An effective teacher will not let a student sit and coast through the class”
2. Expectancy Value Theory

(Wigfield, 1994)

Expectancy $\times$ Value $=$ Motivation

- Expectancy of success
  - Context
- The amount of time and effort needed
- Its importance to the individual
  - Intrinsic Value
  - Utility Value/ Future goals
Excerpt

Ethan (GS):

“I was teaching the first year and the thing that really seemed to encourage students the most is working with authentic texts and authentic songs. When they actually realized they could understand something, those moments are when they were really feel encouraged. They realized that their learning helps someway”
Lance (GS):

“The more you learn, the more you can do. For example, you can read literature from 1500 years ago or 1600 years ago, and you can read about important issues in the world today or some of the commentary that is only in Arabic. Arabic gives you access to a huge world”
3. Self Constructs

- Self-efficacy / esteem

Self-efficacy 学术成就
Excerpt

Ted (3rd year):

“I just found it interesting and fun and I really enjoyed it. It just felt fun or exciting every time I learned something and also I can use it. I could read another word in the newspaper, it just felt good. Sometimes it felt mentally challenging. It is like an exercise for my brain, because it was something different you try to read and read again in order to understand it. It was like a puzzle and when you get a piece to fit, it feels good and you want to work on the next piece, because it was just to feel that process”
Excerpt

Tamara (GS):

“I think it’s always been kind of an obsession, you know. I had a friend who always joked like he said it’s like heroin, you get a little and you just want more. It’s kind of true, you get a little bit and always and always think oh there is more out there. I don’t know, there are just many things I want to read and understand”
Conclusion

- Teacher’s adaptability is the most important characteristic that a language teacher should have

- Effective teaching practices & best teaching practices

- Language teachers in relation to learners’ motivation
  - Experience the flow
  - Expectancy of success
  - Value their learning
  - Self-efficacy
“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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Thank You!!

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References


Image of snowball effect

http://www.1jutabrunei.com/Introduction.htm