



*Full Length Research Paper*

# Discernment of English teacher standard by students in Vietnam: Insinuation for teacher proficient buildout

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This mixed-method study sought to identify the qualities of English teachers that Vietnamese students perceived to enhance their English learning in the informal education sector. Interviews and surveys were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from English learners at nine cities in the South of Vietnam. Students reported 12 qualities perceived as significant factors that influenced their learning. English competence, teaching methods and socio-affective skills were perceived to be the most important teacher qualities by all students. In addition, teachers' knowledge of cultures of English-speaking countries and of Vietnam and the ability to apply information technology into teaching were recognized to affect students' learning, although they were not rated as highly as the other qualities. The study also found that students appeared to demand teachers to conduct their teaching and behave professionally in the class probably because in the informal education sector they were aware of their role as customers, not solely students. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers in the informal education sector need to continuously improve their qualities and adapt to students' various learning needs to facilitate their students-as-customers' learning.

**Keywords:** English learning, socio-affective skills, teacher standard

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher quality has been central to educational research for many years because it is found to influence students' learning outcomes and learning habits considerably (Foster, Toma, & Troske, 2013; Ottmar, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, & Merritt, 2011; Provasnik & Young, 2003). Most recent studies focus on the qualities of teachers in the formal education sector and seem to ignore those in the informal sector, which may contribute a great deal to personal and professional development, particularly in a

time when lifelong learning is emphasised. Departing from this point, this study investigates English teacher quality (ETQ) in the informal education sector in Vietnam from the students' perspective.

In recent years, Vietnam has experienced a high rate of economic growth, increasing foreign investment and overseas study trends (Anwar & Nguyen, 2010), resulting in a growing demand for quality English courses (M. Thompson, 2013; Vietnam Briefing, 2014). Unfortunately,

English teaching in the formal education sector, from elementary to tertiary education, appears to fail to equip students with adequate English competence for effective communication (Tran Thi Tuyet, 2012). Therefore, the majority of employees and students have to attend English classes in commercial English language centres (CECs) to improve their English skills and enhance their employment outcomes.

Previously, most CECs belonged to local tertiary institutions, but now business people and foreign organizations also own and run CECs (Lan Huong, 2005; Van Van, 2011). Private tutoring is another form of commercial English tuition service, which is increasing in popularity because any individual with an adequate knowledge of English can give private English lessons. However, there is a lack of measures for assessing teachers' skills and for controlling teaching quality in the informal education sector in Vietnam. Therefore, managers of a CECs can employ anyone who satisfies their recruitment criteria, not only formally-trained graduates of Education. Currently, teachers working for CECs may include:

- graduates of EFL Education, English Studies, or English Translation and Interpretation
- tertiary, high school and primary school teachers of English
- international students returned from an English speaking country
- individuals with high scores in IELTS, TOEIC and TOEFL tests
- foreigners with fluent English (both native and non-native).

While demand for English courses in CECs has been growing, issues about teaching and learning quality remain under-investigated, raising public concerns about the quality of English teachers in those centers (Tuoitre News, 2014). Few people know exactly how teaching and learning take place in those CECs, except for the learners. In the business environment of the CECs, English learning could be different in nature compared with that in the formal education sector because learning is not compulsory and service-oriented. Students may not consider themselves only as learners but also as customers, so they may become more demanding from teachers compared with students in the formal education sector, even though both sectors are placed within a Confucian educational heritage. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate English learners' perspectives about ETQ that they perceived to enhance their learning in the informal education environment. This study is significant in that it partially depicts teaching and learning in CECs in Vietnam, and provides a platform on which more insights about students' learning needs in the informal education sector can be built. The study may

also suggest improvements to teaching practice and business operations for English teachers and CECs managers respectively based on their customers' needs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Quality standards for English teachers

Many studies about teacher qualities have been conducted across the globe, most of which look into students' perceptions (Koutsoulis, 2003; S. Thompson, 2008). The studies found different perspectives toward teacher qualities between male and female participants as well as between those of different academic achievements. Nevertheless, there was consensus among the research findings of qualities of teachers:

- Expert knowledge of the subject
- Pedagogical skills
- Classroom management skills
- Professional attitude and behavior
- Personal characteristics

Although the aforementioned teacher qualities can be applied for English teachers, teaching English has some unique features compared to other subjects. Borg (2006) inquired into 200 teachers of English and of other subjects to explore distinctive features of English teachers. The findings suggested that English teachers were distinctive from their colleagues of other subjects in terms of the nature of English as a subject, the content of teaching, the teaching methodology, teacher-learner relationships, contrast between native and non-native speakers, and some other aspects. Similarly, Lee (2010) found that English teachers were unique in four dimensions: the complex nature of the subject matter, the teaching content, teaching approach and teacher personality. Therefore, quality standards for English teachers may also be distinctive compared with qualities for teachers of other subjects.

The Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) organization and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) set a number of quality standards for English teachers as follows (Tellez & Waxman, 2005):

- Language: Teachers must understand English as a complete system and each of its components as well as possess deep insights into native and second language acquisition.
- Culture: Teachers must understand how culture may influence students' linguistic development learning achievement. They must also understand key features of the culture where their students are from and are aware

how the culture may affect language learning.

- Planning, implementing, and managing instruction: Teachers must successfully employ pedagogical skills to teach English with standards as well as use resources effectively.
- Assessment: Teachers must be competent in using appropriate assessment activities and techniques to evaluate their students' progress. They also need to be aware that biases in assessment may affect students' learning.
- Professionalism: Teachers must study and research for themselves to advance in their profession. They should also cooperate with colleagues when appropriate.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) also developed a set of quality standards for English teachers (Tellez & Waxman, 2005). The standards look relatively similar to those by the TESOL and NCATE, but THE NBPTS appeared to focus more on the importance of expert knowledge in English language teaching:

- Knowledge of students: Teachers must discern that students' knowledge, skills, interests, aspirations, and values may be affected by their development, language and culture.
- Knowledge of language and language development: Teachers must have a good competence of English and understand the process by which a language, be it native or second, is acquired.
- Knowledge of culture and diversity: Teachers must know how to use culture to facilitate students' learning so that they may achieve greater learning outcomes.
- Knowledge of subject matter: Teachers should own a wide-ranging knowledge of different subjects, in addition to how to assist student learning.

Although the standards were proposed for different purposes, they signified most prominent sets of qualities that English teachers should have. Those standards converged in these points:

- knowledge of English,
- knowledge of the subject matter,
- knowledge of the influence of culture on students' linguistic development
- knowledge of students and students' needs
- teaching competencies,
- skills in using assessment,
- professional attributes, and
- personal attributes

These standards can be a good reference for the assessment of ETQ in such countries where English is taught as a second or foreign language as Vietnam.

### Students' perceptions of ETQ in different countries

In the last decades, qualities that contribute to making effective English teachers have received much attention of researchers. There are both convergences and divergences in these qualities across different countries, time, and groups of perceivers. For example, Brosh (1996) looked for desirable characteristics of foreign language teachers by investigating perceptions of foreign language teachers and students in Israel. The result showed the following desired qualities: (1) good knowledge and command of the target language, (2) ability to recognize, explain, clarify as well as stimulate and prolong students' interest and motivation, (3) demonstration no favoritism or prejudice to any individual student in the class, and (4) availability to students.

In Korea, Park and Lee (2006) sent a self-report questionnaire, which consisted of three categories: English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills, to 339 students in a high school to investigate most-seeking English teacher qualities. Similar to Brosh's findings, Park and Lee recognized that English proficiency and pedagogical knowledge were considered the most important qualities. However, students considered pedagogical knowledge more important than English proficiency. The researchers also found that high achieving students demanded different characteristics of knowledge and socio-affective skills from their teachers compared with low-achieving students. Finally, the researchers discovered that male and female students appreciated different socio-affective attributes of teachers in enhancing their English study.

Four years later, Barnes and Lock (2010) revisited students' perceptions of the attributes that make effective English teachers in Korea. They asked 105 first-year university students taking EFL classes at a women's university to write the characteristics of effective EFL teachers in their native language. The results of the study were described in five categories: rapport, lesson delivery, fairness, knowledge and credibility, and organization and preparation. Accordingly, students considered rapport and delivery as the most important characteristics of an EFL teacher. Particularly, rapport attributes were viewed as the most important to Korean university students who are anxious about English language learning. This study endorsed Park and Lee's study in that Korean students most valued their teachers' ability to deliver the lesson effectively. However, in Barnes and Lock's study, the participants did not rank teachers' knowledge as high as in Park and Lee's study.

In Taiwan, Chen and Lin (2009) examined Chinese

students' viewpoints of the characteristics of effective EFL teachers using a 50-item questionnaire administered to 198 students in Tainan area. The results indicated that the instructional competence, personality, and teacher-student relationship were most desired attributes of an effective EFL teacher. Among the identified qualities, however, instructional competence was considered less important than personality and teacher-student relationship.

In Thailand, based on Park and Lee's study, Wichadee (2010) designed a questionnaire to investigate the characteristics of effective English teachers. Four hundred students in Bangkok University participated in completing the questionnaire. Among the four categories of English teacher characteristics (English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, organization and communication skills, and socio-affective skills), Bangkok University students perceived that effective English teachers are those who are well-organized and possess good communication skills. Wichadee found no difference between male and female students' perception of teacher qualities they needed. The researcher also found no difference in perceptions of good characteristics of English teachers among students of different disciplines.

More recently in Turkey, Çelik, Arıkan, and Caner (2013) conducted a survey to find out the qualities perceived as characteristics of a successful EFL teacher with the participation of 998 undergraduate students. The researcher concluded that pedagogy-specific knowledge, personal traits, professional skills, and classroom behavior were most-wanted characteristics identified by the students.

Not very far from Turkey, two researchers in Cyprus found relatively similar results to those by Çelik et al. (2013). Stella and Dimitris (2013) attempted to identify characteristics and teaching behaviors that effectively support Cypriot students in English study using a questionnaire and focus group interviews. Despite different characteristics found, the findings showed that characteristics that enabled English teachers to conduct student-centered approach in language learning and teaching were most wanted. In the participants' views, effective EFL teachers must take into consideration of their students' individual differences, language anxiety, abilities and interests and be able to create learning environments accordingly. In addition, language teachers who are able to use technology effectively and engage students in meaningful classroom interactions (such as group-work on a real-life topic) are preferred. It means that instructional and/ or pedagogical skills are more significant to Cypriot in defining good EFL teachers.

Most recently, Ramazani (2014) used a self-report questionnaire to investigate 384 university students' beliefs about the characteristics of effective English teachers in Iran. The results showed that students valued teachers' pedagogical knowledge as much as their socio-

affective skills. The researcher also found differences in beliefs of effective teacher characteristics between male and female students. In this study, there were also differences in beliefs of pedagogical knowledge of an effective English teacher between high and low achieving students.

In conclusion, the aforementioned studies indicate that despite different quality standards for English teachers, students shared a consensus on perceptions of English teacher qualities that could facilitate their learning: English competence, pedagogical practice and socio-affective skills. The studies also revealed that there were differences in students' perceptions of the qualities possessed by English teachers across cohorts of students, countries and time.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study sought to identify the most-wanted qualities of English teachers in CECs that students perceived to enhance their learning. The research question was: *What qualities of English teachers do Vietnamese students perceive to facilitate their learning?* A mixed-method approach (Hesse-Biber, 2010) was employed to find answers to the research question. That is both qualitative and quantitative were collected for the study purpose. The study was conducted in the South of Vietnam in late 2013.

### Qualitative stage

The researcher conducted two group interviews with randomly selected students in a CECs in Can Tho City, Southern Vietnam to explore their perceptions of the most-desired English teacher qualities. One interview with six students lasted 45 minutes; the other with eight students lasted for 65 minutes. In addition, the researcher interviewed 13 individual students who could not join the group interviews. The participants ranged from 18 to 27 years of age with diverse backgrounds. Most of them were studying at tertiary level or working in the city at the time.

In the group and individual interviews, the participants were asked to discuss the question: *What are the qualities of an English teacher that you recognize to facilitate your learning in this CECs?* The participants were encouraged to identify all the qualities they needed from an EFL teacher. Interviews stopped when participants stated that they had no more ideas to share.

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analyzed using content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2013) to identify ETQ that students believed to enhance their study.



## Quantitative stage

A survey, which included the 12 English teacher qualities identified in the qualitative phase, was delivered to 339 students learning at different CECs in nine cities in the South of Vietnam. Among the participants, 63.7% were female. The students were from different backgrounds. The percentages of students with high school, undergraduate and postgraduate education were 5%, 86.7% and 8.3% respectively. In terms of geographical distribution, students from major cities accounted for 47.2%, and students were from small towns accounted for 52.8%. In terms of disciplines, 29.2% were from natural sciences, technology and engineering, 15% social sciences, 24.2 business, 12.1% agriculture, 14.5% education and 5% healthcare and medicine. The percentages of those attending below-intermediate and above-intermediate courses were almost equal: 49% and 51% respectively.

In the survey, students were asked to rate the importance of each teacher quality for enhancing their English learning on a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 denoted 'very unimportant' and 5 denoted 'very important'.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the reliability of data. For this study, the alpha was 0.928. Then mean scores were calculated to find the extent to which students perceived the importance of each teacher quality for their English study. The mean scores were interpreted as follows:

- 1.0 to approximate 1.8: very unimportant
- 1.8 to approximate 2.6: unimportant
- 2.6 to approximate 3.4: average
- 3.4 to approximate 4.2: important
- 4.2 to 5.0: very important

Independent samples T-tests and one-way ANOVA tests were performed to check whether there were differences in the perceptions of the importance of ETQ between groups of students.

## RESULTS

### Qualitative results

Qualitative data showed that Vietnamese students need many different qualities from their teachers; however, the qualities they listed can be classified into 12 sets as follows:

1. *English competence*: The majority of the participants stated that the most important quality they look for in an English teacher was his or her ability to use English fluently and

accurately. They admitted that they were not completely sure of the accuracy of their teachers' English use, but they were impressed with teachers whose English sounded natural, fluent and native-like. Most students appeared to evaluate a teacher's proficiency in English based on his or her oral English communication skills and reputation in the EFL teaching-learning community.

2. *Knowledge of subject area content*: Many participants asserted that knowledge of English grammar or vocabulary was inadequate to make a good English teacher. They valued those who possessed knowledge of related fields because *'it is like some spices to make a dish more delicious'*. They felt more motivated if teachers could explain issues related to the topics of the lesson with confidence and clarity.

3. *Knowledge of cultures of English-speaking countries*: Many participants loved to work with a teacher who have travelled, studied or worked in an English speaking country because *'their experiences are real and we felt motivated to learn English so that we can go to other countries like them'*. They also thought that understanding 'Western cultures' should be a distinctive value of English teachers because if *'English teachers don't know the cultures of the UK, the US, who should know?'*. In addition, they felt it interesting and *'cool'* when a Vietnamese English teacher showed gestures or behaviors like Westerners where appropriate.

4. *Knowledge of Vietnamese culture*: Participants recalled a number of experiences where they felt frustrated with a native or foreign English teacher who behaved against standards of Vietnamese culture in the classroom. Although all of the participants said that they could tolerate cultural differences, they still felt *'weird'* or *'uneasy'* with such behaviors, which could affect their learning.

5. *Ability to apply EFL teaching principles*: Some participants observed that some teachers gave *'more logical'* and *'smoother'* lessons than others, which enhanced their learning. This suggests that underpinning EFL teaching principles on which lessons are constructed is of importance in facilitating students' learning.

6. *Ability to meet students' learning needs*: This quality appeared relevant to most of the interviewed students. They explained that they

were willing to pay high tuition fee for an English class in CECs so that they could have better opportunities to achieve their English learning goals. They understood that it was hard for a teacher to meet the learning needs of around 30 students' in a class, but they appreciated those who could address or concern about their learning needs.

7. *Ability to exploit teaching materials effectively:* Students of advanced English levels concerned this quality the most. They stated that they felt bored with teachers who only relied on the textbook for teaching: *'We can read the book and do exercises by ourselves [...]; we need something relevant out of the textbook, probably something applicable to our work.'* They wanted to discuss with teachers most updated information related to the topic of the lesson. Some thought it would be good if teachers could make a link between the knowledge taught in a lesson with reality.

8. *Ability to manage a class effectively:* This quality mostly came from participants of low levels of English and self-confidence. They felt demotivated to be in a class where some 'brilliant' students became pet students, attracting the teacher's attention and giving out all answers. They wanted teachers to treat students equally, to include both easy and difficult questions for students of different English levels, encourage those who cannot give a correct answer and always create a relaxing but intellectual environment in the classroom.

9. *Ability to use effective assessment:* Not many participants were aware of this quality, except those at advanced levels. However, some of them recognized that appropriate use of testing could motivate and facilitate their English learning: *'My previous teacher gave me small tests throughout the course, which helped me review my knowledge and self-assess my English competence frequently.'* Some students also recognized that feedback after tests was useful for them to identify knowledge gaps that need to be filled: *'I loved feedback after tests because it showed me which knowledge gap I should fill. But not many teachers gave me feedback personally.'*

10. *Ability to apply information technologies into teaching:* By 'apply information technologies', students referred to the use of electronic devices in the classroom such as computers and ICT

applications, DVD players, LCD projectors and the use of email and social network. They stressed that appropriate use of information technologies would be preferred. For example, they stated that using PowerPoint presentations made lessons interesting, but excessive use of this technique did not help them much in constructing knowledge.

11. *Professional attributes:* The students spent most of the time discussing this point. They listed numerous behaviors that were considered professional or unprofessional for the teaching career. For example, they wanted teachers to go to class on time, be well-prepared for every lesson, announce their absence in advance, wear and behave properly against standards for the teaching profession. Through the discussion, they seemed to be most concerned about punctuality of teachers, which affected their motivation for learning.

12. *Personal characteristics:* Students listed different personal characteristics of a teacher that could facilitate their English learning. Most of them preferred to learn with a 'dedicated', 'friendly', 'helpful' and 'understanding' teacher because they felt trust and respect from those teachers. Some students wanted teachers to be serious in the classroom but friendly outside the class. They also valued teachers who maintained contact with them via email, phone or social media.

## Quantitative results

Mean scores in Table 1 shows the importance of each ETQ for enhancing students' English learning at CECs. Accordingly, students perceived that their teachers' English competence ( $M=4.48$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ), ability to use appropriate EFL teaching techniques ( $M=4.46$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ) were 'very important' whereas the others were 'important' for enhancing their learning. Out of the twelve qualities, professional attributes ( $M=3.61$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ) and ability to apply IT into teaching ( $M=3.78$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ) appeared to enhance students' learning the least.

Four independent samples T-tests were run to test whether there were differences in the perceptions of the importance of the qualities for enhancing their English learning between:

1. male and female students
2. students from small and big cities
3. students of below- and above-intermediate levels of English

**Table 1.** Students' perceptions of the importance of ETQ for enhancing their English learning

English teacher qualities	N	M	SD
English competence	339	4.48	1.05
Ability to apply EFL teaching principles	339	4.46	1.02
Ability to manage the class	339	4.19	1.08
Personal attributes	339	4.12	1.10
Ability to meet students' learning needs	339	4.11	1.15
Ability to use effective assessment	339	4.08	1.06
Ability to exploit teaching resources	339	3.99	1.06
Knowledge of subject area content	339	3.94	1.13
Knowledge of cultures of English speaking countries	339	3.89	1.11
Knowledge of Vietnamese culture	339	3.83	1.08
Ability to apply IT into teaching	339	3.78	1.16
Professional attributes	339	3.61	1.15

#### 4. students studying less and more than six months at CECs.

The results of the first independent samples T-test showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the importance of teacher qualities for enhancing their learning between male and female students.

The results of the second independent samples T-test suggested that there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the importance of the qualities for enhancing their learning between students from small and big cities in ten qualities. The mean differences (MD) revealed that students in big cities valued teacher qualities in enhancing their learning than their peers in small cities (Table 2).

The results of the third independent samples T-test indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the importance of teacher qualities for enhancing their learning between students who studied at above-intermediate and below-intermediate levels of English in two qualities. The mean differences revealed that the former valued their teachers' English competence and understanding of cultures of English speaking countries more than the latter (Table 3).

The results of the fourth independent samples T-test showed that there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the importance of the qualities for enhancing their learning between students who studied less than six months and those who studied more than six months at a CECs in five qualities. The mean differences indicated that the former needed those five

teacher qualities to enhance their learning than the latter (Table 4).

Furthermore, one-way ANOVA tests were conducted to test whether there were differences in the perceptions of the importance of the qualities for their English learning between:

1. students of different levels of education
2. students of different disciplines
3. students enrolling in an English course at different types of CECs

The results of the first ANOVA test suggested no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of the importance of the qualities for their English study between high school students, university students and graduates in all 12 qualities.

Similarly, the results of the second ANOVA test indicated no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of the importance of the qualities for their English study between students of different disciplines in all 12 qualities.

The results of the third ANOVA test showed that there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the importance of the qualities for their English learning between students who studied with tutors (CEC type A), at CEC owned by a tertiary institution or high school (CEC type B), at CEC owned by Vietnamese business people (CEC type C) and at CEC owned by a foreign organization (CEC type D). Results of a Turkey post hoc test indicated that students at CEC type C perceived the importance of four qualities significantly higher than those at CEC type B. Particularly for 'ability to use different

**Table 2.** Differences in perceptions of the importance of ETQ between students in big and small cities

English teacher qualities	Big cities (N=160)		Small cities (N=179)		MD	Leuve n Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD					
English competence	4.78	0.64	4.22	1.26	0.56	0.00	5.28	271.18	0.00
Knowledge of subject area content	4.18	0.93	3.72	1.25	0.46	0.00	3.87	326.64	0.00
Understanding of cultures of English speaking countries	4.20	0.89	3.60	1.22	0.60	0.00	5.20	324.64	0.00
Understanding of Vietnamese culture	4.03	1.01	3.65	1.12	0.38	0.01	3.27	336.99	0.00
Ability to apply EFL teaching principles	4.73	0.64	4.22	1.21	0.51	0.00	4.94	276.35	0.00
Ability to meet students' learning needs	4.29	0.97	3.95	1.28	0.34	0.00	2.76	328.34	0.01
Ability to manage the class	4.48	0.82	3.93	1.21	0.55	0.00	4.97	315.67	0.00
Ability to use different kinds of assessment	4.30	0.87	3.89	1.18	0.41	0.00	3.69	325.22	0.00
Professional attributes	3.78	0.98	3.47	1.26	0.31	0.00	2.50	330.86	0.01
Personal characteristics	4.41	0.82	3.86	1.24	0.55	0.00	4.82	310.64	0.00

**Table 3.** Differences in perceptions of the importance of ETQ between students at below- and above-intermediate levels of English

English teacher qualities	below inter. level (N=166)		above inter. level (N=173)		MD	Leuve n Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD					
English competence	4.32	1.20	4.64	0.86	-0.32	0.00	-2.84	299.14	0.01
Understanding of cultures of English speaking countries	3.74	1.14	4.02	1.07	-0.28	0.16	-2.35	337.00	0.02

kinds of assessment', students who learned English with private tutors rated it significantly higher than students in CEC types B and D (Table 5).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify the most-wanted qualities of English teachers in CECs that Vietnamese students perceived to enhance their learning. Among the 12 teacher qualities identified, teachers' English competence, ability to apply EFL teaching principles, ability to manage the class and personal characteristics were perceived to be the most important by students. Those findings are consistent with previous studies which were conducted in the formal education sector in other countries, as showed in the Literature review.

Teachers' English competence was considered the most important factor that enhanced students' learning in this study. However, it is evident that at present the majority of Vietnamese English teachers did not have adequately good English skills: Most teachers were good at grammar and vocabulary but their listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills were not at acceptable levels (Thanhniem News, 2012; Trung Dung, 2013; Tuoitre News, 2014; Viet Toan, 2013). Such a low level of English proficiency of English teachers would hinder students' learning achievements. Therefore, it is recommended that Vietnamese English teachers at CEC should improve their English competence to enhance students' learning. This is important because Vietnamese English teachers are running the risk of losing their jobs in the long-term as there has been an increase in number of foreign English teachers in Vietnam.



**Table 4.** Differences in perceptions of the importance of ETQ between students studying less and more than six months at CEC

English teacher qualities	less than 6 months (N=196)		more than 6 months (N=143)		MD	Leuven Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD					
English competence	4.37	1.12	4.64	0.92	-0.28	0.00	-2.48	332.19	0.01
Knowledge of subject area content	3.80	1.13	4.13	1.12	-0.33	0.46	-2.63	337.00	0.01
Understanding of Vietnamese culture	3.72	1.09	3.99	1.05	-0.27	0.14	-2.26	337.00	0.03
Ability to manage the class	4.08	1.09	4.34	1.05	-0.27	0.65	-2.26	337.00	0.03
Personal characteristics	3.97	1.18	4.32	0.95	-0.34	0.01	-2.95	333.96	0.00

**Table 5.** Differences in perceptions of the importance of ETQ between students studying at different types of CEC

Dependent Variable	I	J	Anova sig	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Turkey Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				(I-J)			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
English competence	CEC type C	CEC type B	0.00	0.42 <sup>*</sup>	0.12	0.00	0.12	0.73
Understanding of cultures of English-speaking cultures	CEC type C	CEC type B	0.00	0.48 <sup>*</sup>	0.12	0.00	0.16	0.80
Ability to apply EFL teaching principles	CEC type C	CEC type B	0.01	0.31 <sup>*</sup>	0.11	0.04	0.01	0.61
Ability to use different kinds of assessment	CEC type A	CEC type B	0.01	0.80 <sup>*</sup>	0.27	0.02	0.09	1.51
		CEC type D		1.04 <sup>*</sup>	0.38	0.04	0.05	2.03
Professional attributes	CEC type C	CEC type B	0.03	0.35 <sup>*</sup>	0.13	0.04	0.01	0.68
Personal characteristics	CEC type C	CEC type B	0.04	0.32 <sup>*</sup>	0.12	0.05	0.00	0.64

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

• In addition, many researchers have found effective instructional methods to influence students' achievements of English (Amin Mekheimer & Shabieb Aldosari, 2013; Ching-ning, 2014). In the interviews, participants stated that they could feel a difference between teachers who possessed good competence of EFL teaching principles and those who did not. They felt that teachers who could deliver a lesson in a logical and

smooth manner facilitated their learning. This suggests that students in CEC learned consciously and reflexively rather than passively. Therefore, teachers should exploit teaching methods that actively engage students in mastering English knowledge and skills. Similarly, class management skills are part of teaching practice that could contribute to increasing student engagement in learning and creating equal learning opportunities in the

class. This is significant due to the fact that students had to pay in order to reserve a place in the course; thus, they should be treated equally. However, teachers in CECs should not always satisfy students-as-customers' not-for-learning demands but should apply monitoring techniques to help them focus on deep learning.

- This study also found that teacher personalities or socio-affective skills could influence students' learning of English, which is consistent with findings of many researchers in English teaching and learning (Hazrul Nik Hashim, Shah Alam, & Yusoff, 2014; Peiser & Jones, 2014; Wichadee, 2010). Both qualitative and quantitative data suggested that students wanted to study with teachers of agreeable personalities, not only in the classroom but also after class. They also wanted accessible teachers whom they could ask for consultation in learning methods or constructive feedback. They also demand teacher to treat all students fairly in the class and behaved professionally. This is noteworthy because Vietnam has an education with Confucian heritages where teachers usually have power and seemed more distanced to students than teachers in the West (Nguyen Thi Nhai & Tran Thi Ly, 2014; Wei, 2012), resulting in a lack of student-teacher interaction and thus could limit students' learning outcome. However, in this study, students seemed to move beyond that student-teacher relationship restriction. Perhaps, in the business sector, students were aware of themselves being not only learners but also customers of the teachers at CECs. As stated by students in the interviews, many teachers in CECs did not behave professionally, which made them unhappy and in turn affected their learning. Therefore, teachers need to establish good relationships with students and behave professionally not only to please their customers but also to enhance students' learning experience.

In addition to the most wanted teacher qualities that have just been discussed, the following qualities have some merits for English teachers in CECs to take into consideration although they were not rated as importantly as others.

- In this study, students rated teacher's ability to apply information technology into teaching as 'important' for enhancing their learning. This finding is consistent with current trend in applying computer applications and online resources into English teaching (Han, 2014; Kruk, 2012). In Vietnam, the number of people with computer literacy has been increasing (Datamonitor, 2009) and there has been an ongoing promotion of applying information technology into teaching by educational leaders (Peeraer & Van Petegem, 2012). However, it is evident that Vietnamese teachers - though not English teachers particularly - appeared not to use information technology in their teaching very much, but they were

aware of the benefits that ICT-integrated learning would bring (Ly Thanh Hue & Ab Jalil, 2013; Peeraer & Van Petegem, 2012). Therefore, teachers in CECs should learn and apply ICT applications to enhance students' motivation, or interact with them via social media to support their learning after class, which also tighten teacher-student relationships. It is also noted that the use of information technology in the classroom should be appropriate and effective, as it was stated by students, to facilitate students' learning.

- Many studies have found the impact of students' culture on their language learning achievements (Mertin, 2014; Neff & Rucynski, 2013; Nguyen Thanh Tung, 2005). Interestingly, in this study students mentioned the influence of teachers' understanding of cultures of English speaking countries and of Vietnam on their learning. Students suggested that they could only tolerate behaviors of foreign teachers that went against local cultural standards to a certain extent. Similarly, students were motivated by Vietnamese English teachers' real experiences with cultures of an English speaking country. They liked teachers using Western-like gestures, but they stressed that these gestures must not be used excessively. For those reasons, both foreign and Vietnamese teachers needs to equip themselves with adequate insights into cultures of Vietnam and of English speaking countries as well as monitor their behaviours in the classroom in order not to offend students.

Furthermore, statistical analysis showed that students' gender, levels of education (high school, undergraduate, postgraduate) and study discipline did not significantly affect students' perceptions of the ETQ that enhanced their English learning. However, students' geographic distribution (or where they lived), levels of English, study length at CECs and the type of CECs students attended were found to significantly influence their perceptions of ETQ. This finding suggests that there could be no single set of ETQ that can fit all groups of students. As such, it is teachers' responsibility to explore their students' needs so that they can make appropriate adaptation to facilitate students' learning.

- Students in big cities were aware of the effect of their teacher qualities on their learning more clearly than those in small cities. Similarly, the longer students studied at a CEC, the more students recognized the influence of ETQ on their learning. This could be because students had more opportunities to study with different English teachers and compared the teaching effectiveness of those teachers when students lived in big cities or studied at CECs for a long time. Those findings suggest that the two groups of students could be more demanding for qualified teachers than their peers. As such, English teachers should be more concerned about the needs of those two groups of students.

- This study also found that when students achieved a higher level of English, they became more concern about their teachers' English competence and knowledge of cultures of English speaking countries. It is natural that as students advance with their English learning, they need teachers who could explain concerns of higher level of complexity about English knowledge and cultures of countries where the language is spoken. Therefore, advanced English classes need to be taught by experienced teachers with sound knowledge of English and cultures.

- In addition, this study showed that students at different types of CECs needed different teacher qualities for their learning. In most of the cases, students in CECs owned by business people valued their teachers' English competence, understanding of cultures of English speaking countries, ability to apply EFL teaching principles, professional attributes and personal characteristics in enhancing their learning more than their peers in CECs owned by a tertiary institution or a high school. Meanwhile, students who learned English with private tutors valued their teachers' ability to use assessment effectively than those in CECs owned by a tertiary institution or high school and CECs owned by a foreign organization. This could be explained by the fact that students usually chose to learn with a tutors when they need a highly tailored English course, particularly to pass an important exam. As such, how teachers use tests and post-test feedback is important for students to self-evaluate their English skills and tackle their weaknesses based on teachers' feedback. Those findings suggest that teachers at different types of CECs need to make inquiries into what students need from them to support students' learning at their best.

In conclusion, this study found 12 ETQ that students in CECs in Vietnam perceived to improve their English learning. Among the identified qualities, teachers' English competence, teaching skills and socio-affective skills were perceived to facilitate students learning significantly. This finding is consistent with many studies conducted in the formal education sector in other countries. As expected, students were found to demand teachers to meet their learning needs, behave appropriately and professionally in the class and maintain good relationships with them probably because students were aware of themselves as customers at CECs. Furthermore, this study found differences in the most-wanted ETQ between students in different types of CECs, students in small and big cities, students at different levels of English and students with different study length at a CECs. Although this study provides some insights into students' perceptions of ETQ at CECs, however, it is recommended that teachers and managers in CECs should investigate their students' preferences of ETQ in the language centres and improve their teaching

practice and business operations accordingly to meet their customers' learning needs.

## ABBREVIATIONS

CECs:	Commercial English language centres
ETQ:	English teacher quality
EFL:	English as a foreign language
IELTS:	International English Language Testing System
TOEIC:	Test of English as International Communication
TOEFL:	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TESOL:	Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages
NCATE:	The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
NBPTS:	The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

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