



# Learner Perceptions of Effective L2 English Tertiary Teachers: Qualities and Skills

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## Abstract

This paper reports on developing trends of learner perceptions of effective qualities Second Language (L2) English. The role of teacher personality (Sakkir et al., 2021) and teacher ability to integrate technologies in L2 English instruction (Lee et al., 2024) play an integral role in successful L2 English tertiary student learning across the world. Teachers share their personality with students through their class instruction and individual interactions. A teacher's ability to connect in a meaningful and personable way through their interpersonal skills is a key aspect of an effective language teacher for L2 English learners (Pishgadam et al., 2021). Measuring L2 English teacher effectiveness is critical to the improvement of student learning and teacher performance (Agudo, 2019). Teachers function as agents of learning for their students through their facilitation and leadership. Technological developments and the COVID-19 pandemic are important phenomena that have shaped the evolving perceptions of learners about effective L2 English teachers. Consequently, there are COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 studies that have explored the technological qualities that L2 English tertiary learners desire in their teachers (Rifiyanti, 2020; Tran & Duong, 2020). The increasing development of technology has resulted in the growing acceptance of their use in L2 English tertiary language learning spaces (Yang & Li, 2024). Findings presented in this paper are discussed in the context of the researcher's Japan-based fieldwork and a culturally diverse range of contemporary studies that provide relevant and timely updates on learner perceptions available in this research area.

**Keywords:** tertiary education; learner perceptions; effective teachers; qualities; skills

## **1. Introduction**

English language teaching and learning incorporates a variety of constructs, such as English as a foreign language (EFL), English as a lingua franca (ELF), Global Englishes, World Englishes, etc. For the purpose of this paper, Second language (L2) English learning will be a general term of use to identify the various constructs of English language teaching and learning that exist. The analysis of the perceptions of L2 English learners about the qualities and skills that they desire their teachers to possess falls into the categories of personal and professional qualities and technological skills. Background research into these qualities and skills covers pre-, during, and post-COVID-19 pandemic period. Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic includes the years from 2019 to 2023. This paper reviews contemporary research into tertiary L2 English learners' perceptions of the most valued positive personal and professional qualities and skills they perceive effective L2 English teachers should possess. The studies included in this paper represent findings based upon tertiary learners' perceptions from a diverse range of countries and with the same focus in mind of determining the most desirable qualities of L2 English teachers that L2 English tertiary learners seek.

## **2. Literature review**

Focusing on the past decade of developments, the studies included in this paper represent tertiary learners' perspectives of good or effective L2 English tertiary teacher qualities and characteristics. The literature reviewed provides a foundation for analysis of the findings from research conducted by the researcher.

Febriyanti (2018) described the determination of an effective L2 English tertiary teacher as a complex and debatable reality for researchers that is difficult to explain because the views vary among countries, contexts, and across disciplines. In a systematic review by Al-Muslim & Ishmail (2020), the categorization of quality characteristics of effective second or foreign language teachers by their learners was associated with relationships, knowledge and credibility, and the delivery of educational teaching and learning content. In contrast, a categorization of qualities and skills desired by learners about their teachers was conducted in research by Sakkir et al. (2021) who found that teacher competencies related to various characteristics: personality (36%), pedagogical (25%), social (21%), and professional (18%). There has been a recent shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness in foreign language teaching as the scientific and theoretical knowledge base on how language students learn grows (Taheri, 2020). A review of the literature resulted in the categorisation of teacher qualities into the personal, professional, and technological elemental properties as desired by L2 English learners.

### **2.1 Personal Qualities of Effective L2 English Teachers**

From the perspective of L2 English learners, a teacher's ability to connect with students in a meaningful and personable way is a key aspect of an effective language teacher (Pishgadam et al., 2021; Zaid, 2019). Research conducted by Zamani and Ahangari (2016) found that Iranian EFL undergraduates assign the greatest importance to a teacher's personality and behaviour toward students. Zamani and Ahangari identified that students want their teachers to possess the qualities of having a good sense of humour, being approachable and

friendly, being polite and respectful of the personality of the students, being helpful to students in and outside of the classroom, being flexible and open to criticism, and patient. In another Iran-based study, Soudkhah Mohammadi et al. (2025) indicated that L2 English tertiary learners valued teacher concern for them because it helped seed learner self-belief. Further evidence shows that L2 English learners have expectations of their teachers in various cultural settings. Ibad's (2018) Pakistan-based study of undergraduates examined the traits of effective EFL teachers and found that students focus on personality traits such as positivity, good communication, motivation, and respectfulness to students. Similarly, Febriyanti's (2018) exploration of Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of good language teachers indicated a profile of preferred characteristics including motivation, enthusiasm, and good communication.

Even with the emergence of changes in education delivery modes from face-to-face learning to blended learning and fully asynchronous learning resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, personal teacher qualities remain important. Tran and Duong (2020) reported in their study of Vietnamese EFL tertiary students that although the role of teachers became more autonomy-oriented during the pandemic, students desire their teachers to possess the following personal characteristics: friendliness, enthusiasm, humorousness, motivation, and helpfulness. A study of Thai L2 English tertiary learners (Wangdi & Shimray, 2022) similarly found that students want their teachers to have sound socio-affective skills and know how to interact with them and treat them with respect, dignity, and positivity. These studies show that for L2 English tertiary learners, the personality of their teacher is important.

## **2.2 Professional Qualities of Effective L2 English Teachers**

Teachers function as agents of learning for students through their leadership and facilitation. Lavy (2016) argued that teachers require sound knowledge of subject matter and effective technical guidance to support the development of students' analytical and critical skills. At the tertiary level, leadership takes place in the form of guidance in the direction of curricula and syllabi. Facilitation of a teaching approach that is learner-centred occurs through learner-activated processes such as autonomy-oriented learning. In a study of EFL undergraduates in Colombia, Sánchez Solarte et al. (2016) reported that learners desire their teachers to be able to lead them and competently facilitate their learning, provide cooperative learning, and accommodate for autonomous learning opportunities. Zaid's (2019) exploration of EFL tertiary students in Morocco found that learners highly valued student centeredness for their learning and the professional qualities of ethicalness and knowledgeable about subject matter as determinants of a teacher's instructional effectiveness. Correspondingly, Pham's (2022) research pointed to EFL students in Vietnam identifying the qualities of a professional attitude and knowledge of appropriate teaching methodologies as being integral to effective teaching.

Learner perceptions of teacher credibility and success can be a mixture of professional qualities underpinned by personal qualities. Pishgadam et al. (2021) research of Iranian and Iraqi EFL students showed that culturally appropriate quality communication with students, the ability to build trusting relationships, and strong pedagogical knowledge are highly regarded by students. With a focus on examining EFL tertiary learner perceptions of teacher

enthusiasm in China, Dewaele and Li (2021) found that students like teachers who display friendliness, skilfulness with creating and teaching interesting materials and lessons, and an understanding of how to teach materials to students engagingly. Furthermore, a study (Nurie Bogale & Wale, 2024) of Ethiopian Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) tertiary students showed that they wanted their teachers to have sound linguistic knowledge, an ability to manage the learning process for students and accommodate their individual learning needs. Findings from these studies demonstrate that L2 English learners seek various professional qualities in their teachers, and are often referenced by learners in connection with personal qualities.

### **2.3 Technological Skills of Effective L2 English Teachers**

Technological developments and the COVID-19 pandemic are important phenomena that have shaped the evolving perceptions of learners about effective L2 English teachers. The ever-increasing development of educational technologies has resulted in the growing implementation of blended learning modes in many higher education institutions (Shahid et al., 2023). Consequently, there are COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 studies that have explored the technological skills that L2 English tertiary learners desire in their teachers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Rifiyanti's (2020) study of Indonesian EFL tertiary students' perceptions of online English learning found that the notion of being an effective teacher is strongly associated with the level of competency that a teacher displays with educational technologies. Rifiyanti noted that the EFL learners perceived teacher competency to be associated with appropriate technical skills to teach online learners so that they can provide informative feedback, accommodate learner characteristics, and understand learners' varying language and technical skills.

The past two decades have seen a sharp increase in various technological tools available to both teachers and students (McCulloch et al., 2018). With the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), language learners have become exposed to the multi-faceted technology-mediated world outside of their school environments and it is inevitable to see the integration of digital resources into language instruction (Veliz & Hossein, 2020). Research conducted by Tran and Duong (2020) explored factors that influence Vietnamese EFL learners' support for promoting learner autonomy within a portfolio-based writing course. Tran and Duong found that the supportive factors includes developed skills and awareness of learner autonomy, positive feedback on the use of portfolio, and the teacher's autonomy-oriented role. An equally important finding by Tran and Duong was learners' desire to have teachers that fulfil multiple roles, such as being a helper, supporter guide, mentor, resource, facilitator, and motivator, to promote learner autonomy in the classroom. Similarly, Chen's (2021) investigation of Chinese EFL learners' perceptions of teachers' practice showed that learners want teachers who could provide them with access to collaborative learning opportunities to avoid student exclusion and who are highly competent with technological tools. In an example of teacher-led use of technology for class learning, EFL learners in a Turkiye-based study (Söğüt & Atasever Belli, 2024) strongly indicated that the facilitation of QR code based mobile learning can make learning environments more participatory, safe, inclusive, and cooperative. Of equal importance to these skills, Chen (2021) reported that

students referred to the significance of personal teacher qualities for effective instruction, namely, being motivated, engaging, and supportive. The studies presented in this section show that L2 English tertiary learners want their teachers to have technological skills and specific personal and professional qualities.

### **3. Research Questions**

The following questions formed this primary research:

1. During the past decade, what qualities and skills have L2 English tertiary learners perceived to be important in the makeup of effective L2 English teachers?
2. From the researcher's prior fieldwork, are there differences in L2 English tertiary learners' perceptions of effective L2 English tertiary teachers in relation to binary gender or tertiary level of the participants?

### **4. Methodology**

#### **4.1 Participants**

Recruits for this research were first, second, and third year Japanese students studying General English and Academic English courses taught by the researcher at a university in Japan. Participant consent was obtained voluntarily from 249 students. De-identifying numbers were used to represent participants and their names excluded from the data collection to ensure confidentiality of the responses.

#### **4.2 Data Collection and Data Analysis**

This study aimed to develop primary research in the form of raw data that could be analysed and evaluated in secondary research. The researcher engaged in the data gathering process to obtain original data specific to the setting of Japanese L2 tertiary learners and their perceptions of effective teacher qualities and skills. Primary research allowed the researcher an appropriate degree of control in the decision-making of participant recruitment, sample size, and sampling strategy (Denny & Clark, 2021). Recruitment was open to all students enrolled in the courses taught by the researcher. In the process of obtaining participant consent, all research objectives were communicated in written English and Japanese and that neither participation nor non-participation would have any influence on student grades in their course.

Upon receiving approval from the Ethics committee, data collection took place in the final lesson of the course. Following data collection over a period of two weeks, data analysis ensued over the next two weeks. The researcher checked the results by counting multiple times the answer tallies to ensure accuracy of the results.

### **5. Results**

Results about the L2 English tertiary learner preferences of teacher qualities that they desire their teachers to possess has been explored in substantial detail in prior research (Leichsenring, 2017; Leichsenring & Dimoski, 2017). The following results in Tables One to Six display a snapshot of previously unpublished research and include the top five selected qualities determined to be desirable for effective L2 English learners. The participants'

preferences are categorized by the total number of tertiary learners who joined the research, by their binary gender status, and by their educational year level.

*Table 1: Teacher Qualities of all Students - 2017 to 2019 (N=249)*

|     |    |                             |
|-----|----|-----------------------------|
| 1st | 39 | friendly                    |
| 2nd | 37 | knowledgeable               |
| 3rd | 35 | enthusiastic about teaching |
| 4th | 32 | kind                        |
| 5th | 28 | polite                      |

*Table 2: Teacher Qualities of Female Students only - 2017 to 2019 (n=132)*

|     |    |                             |
|-----|----|-----------------------------|
| 1st | 24 | enthusiastic about teaching |
| 2nd | 20 | knowledgeable               |
| 3rd | 18 | polite                      |
| 4th | 14 | kind                        |
| 5th | 13 | friendly                    |

*Table 3: Teacher Qualities of Male Students only - 2017 to 2019 (n=117)*

|     |    |                             |
|-----|----|-----------------------------|
| 1st | 26 | friendly                    |
| 2nd | 18 | kind                        |
| 3rd | 17 | knowledgeable               |
| 4th | 16 | humorous                    |
| 5th | 11 | enthusiastic about teaching |

*Table 4: Teacher Qualities of First Year Students only - 2017 to 2019 (n=103)*

|     |    |                             |
|-----|----|-----------------------------|
| 1st | 18 | friendly                    |
| 2nd | 17 | knowledgeable               |
| 3rd | 16 | enthusiastic about teaching |

*Table 5: Teacher Qualities of Second Year Students only - 2017 to 2019 (n=81)*

|     |    |                             |
|-----|----|-----------------------------|
| 1st | 13 | friendly                    |
| 2nd | 12 | enthusiastic about teaching |
| 3rd | 10 | knowledgeable               |

*Table 6: Teacher Qualities of Third Year Students only - 2016 to 2019 (n=65)*

|     |    |                             |
|-----|----|-----------------------------|
| 1st | 10 | knowledgeable               |
| 2nd | 8  | friendly                    |
| 3rd | 7  | enthusiastic about teaching |

## 6. Discussion

These above stated results are examined in reference to the research questions outlined earlier. Several existing studies have produced similar results to the fieldwork conducted by the researcher in relation to personal and professional qualities. In particular, the qualities of friendliness (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Zamani & Ahangari, 2016), politeness (Zamani & Ahangari, 2016), enthusiasm (Febriyanti, 2018), knowledgeability of subject matter (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Lavy, 2016; Pham, 2022; Pishgadam et al., 2021; Zaid, 2019). While preferences for personal and professional qualities that L2 English tertiary learners think effective L2 English teachers should possess have shown similar results, some studies have found that technological skills are emerging as important future considerations for good or effective L2 English teachers.

The researcher is currently completing fieldwork about technological skills that L2 English tertiary learners desire in effective L2 English teachers and aims to publish the results soon. However, recent findings from cotemporary research have indicated that L2 English tertiary learners want their teachers to adopt technologies for student learning experiences (Veliz & Hossein, 2020), facilitate autonomous learning opportunities for students (Tran & Duong, 2020), and make learning experiences using technologies to be collaborative in their

design (Chen, 2021). Furthermore, recent studies show the significance that L2 English learners place on the use of technologies for their language learning. L2 English tertiary learners have voiced teacher readiness in the use of technologies as a major point for consideration. In a Korea-based study, Lee et al. (2024) reported that L2 English learners want teachers who can instruct them with detailed guidance on how and when to use AI-based tools to improve their English writing skills, for example, using the language software-editing tool called Grammarly. Changing learning contexts also influence how L2 English learners perceive the role of technology in their learning environments. While in a Ukraine-based study, Kupchyk and Litvinchuk (2025) found that L2 English learners value using portable devices, preferably smartphones due to their unstable and their frequently interrupted learning environments. Kupchyk and Litvinchuk stated that L2 English learners prefer doing group collaborative tasks to resolve a problem, share resources, and produce a joint response, such as posting oral video responses, creating digital stories, or via game-based learning, for example, using quizzed-based games software such as Kahoot and Quizlet. Learner preferences in the abovementioned studies for the inclusion of technologies with their language learning experiences is supported by earlier research that suggested L2 English learners need teachers who can deal with educational platforms (technologies) to a level that allows them to meet student needs, such as troubleshooting (Rifiyanti, 2020).

There is no locatable research available about L2 English tertiary learner preferences of effective teacher qualities in association with binary gender or tertiary year level. Therefore, these results from Table 2 to Table 6 stand alone with the absence of comparative findings in any other studies in this field.

## **7. Limitations**

Any potential issues with ambiguous meanings of the qualities in the teacher checklist included in the current study (see Appendix A) was mitigated by way of the inclusion of carefully considered translated meanings provided for each teacher quality in Japanese (with the English words). Several native Japanese professors with academic backgrounds in Linguistics assisted in crosschecking the Japanese translation of each quality prior to data collection. At the time of this paper, the researcher has begun an exploration of technological skills that learners want their teachers to possess which will help to expand knowledge about what L2 English tertiary learners perceive as important qualities and skills for the language development. Findings from this primary research provides a foundation for secondary data analysis, for further clarification of the current findings, and the inclusion of new perspectives in this field.

## **8. Conclusion and Future Directions**

For L2 English tertiary learners, personal and professional qualities have remained an important consideration in their perceptions of effective L2 English teachers for the past decade. More specifically, this has proved to be the case in light of changes to learning modes in tertiary education due to circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, software such as those available for game-based learning and language translation are becoming more prevalent in language learning settings. Future directions for research in this



field include a possible exploration of L2 English tertiary learners' preferences for the technological skills that they desire in effective L2 English tertiary teachers. In consideration of such technological skills, a secondary research analysis that explores L2 English learner preferences for any educational platforms, software, and devices could be included in any future research. Any research into the use of educational technologies with L2 English learning may consider learner perceptions of how an effective L2 English teacher could implement them for the development of the core language skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. A final proposal for future research is the undertaking of an exploration of what L2 English tertiary learners perceive effective teachers need to be able to do well to accommodate their use of educational technologies for student in- and out of the classroom learning experiences.

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## **Appendix A**

### Teacher qualities checklist

|  |                             |  |                   |  |                |
|--|-----------------------------|--|-------------------|--|----------------|
| Select from these qualities in order from 1 <sup>st</sup> to 10 <sup>th</sup> (You can add “others” if you want.). |                             |  |                   |  |                |
|  | Flexible                    |  | Friendly          |  | Compassionate  |
|  | Honest                      |  | Fair              |  | Plays games    |
|  | Humorous                    |  | Caring            |  | Polite         |
|  | Prepared                    |  | Good communicator |  | Motivational   |
|  | Enthusiastic about teaching |  | Knowledgeable     |  | Self-confident |
|  | Kind                        |  | Leader            |  | Inspired       |
|  | Creative                    |  | Organized         |  | Empathetic     |
|  | Patient                     |  | Good listener     |  | Unbiased       |
|  | Sternness                   |  | Other             |  | Other          |