

EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE LECTURERS' COMPETENCE BASED ON THEIR BACKGROUND

Persepsi Mahasiswa EFL dari Kompetensi Dosen Berdasarkan Latar Belakangnya

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at finding out and describing (1) how the EFL students perceive the lecturers' competence viewed from their educational qualifications (Bachelor, Master, Doctor, or Professor), (2) how the EFL students perceive the lecturers' competence viewed from their personal background in terms of age (young and old), and (3) how the EFL students perceive the lecturers' competence viewed from their personal background in terms of gender (male and female). The results of the research are expected to give meaningful information to the readers, particularly the students, about how to behave and communicate well with the lecturers without paying attention to their background. The research findings showed that the students perceived the lecturers with Master degree are more competence and have a good personality rather than lecturers with Bachelor Degree and Doctorate Degree viewed from their educational background. If they are viewed from their personal background in terms of age and gender, students perceived that male and young lecturers are more competence than female and old lecturers, but female and old lecturers have a better personality than male and young lecturers.

Keywords: *Perception, competence, educational and personal background*

There are two sets of qualities that characterize a successful professional teacher: professional characteristics and professional competencies (Whitty, 1996, p.89–90). Professional characteristics include professional values, personal and professional development, communication and relationships as well as synthesis and application. Professional competencies include knowledge and understanding of children and their learning, subject knowledge, curriculum, the education system, and the teacher's role. On the other hand, Medley and Shannon (1994) hold that there are three dimensions of teacher quality instead of two:

- a. Teacher effectiveness (the degree to which a teacher achieves desired effects upon students) teacher competence includes three main components: interpersonal skills, classroom procedures and subject knowledge. The first component includes parts that can be associated with social competence. This



concept has, as its consequence, the teacher's ability to communicate with the student, a positive student approach, understanding students' learning difficulties, acknowledging the individual student, being someone the students can trust.

- b. Teacher competence (the extent to which a teacher has the knowledge and skills). The second component includes that which in more general terms is called teaching skills, i.e. the ability to organize and teach in interesting and flexible ways, using good teaching methods. Although students' self-confidence and self-conceptions are dependent on many background conditions as well as on earlier school experiences, our understanding is that high teacher competence can lead to positive individual student development. Conversely, an incompetent teacher can adversely affect students' attitudes to learning and lower their self-conceptions. Another assumption is that the more positive students' attitudes to schooling and teacher competence are, the less likely they are to display aggressive behavior.
- c. Teacher performance (how a teacher behaves in the process of teaching). The third component is related to the teachers' subject knowledge and their ability to plan and structure the content. These different components are naturally assumed to be interrelated. In situations where the teachers are interpersonally oriented, attentive, empathic and fully cognizant of the students' ability and they believe in the students, the students are extremely positive towards teaching (Skolverket, 1995; Chedzoy and Burden, 2007).

Even if differences between schools and classes can be explained to a certain extent by factors in the students' backgrounds, it is believed that teachers and school leaders are those who have the greatest influence on the school's inner environment and culture. Hence, the purpose of this article is to probe how student teachers in the English language teaching department see teachers' competence and skills, to which factors they attribute their success and failure in language learning, and what they think the solutions are.

Even though most students in school have a clear notion of their teachers' different capacities, we still lack information regarding the importance of the



teacher for student development; to some extent this has been difficult, owing to the many different factors of influence concerned. Nor has one had the necessary methods of analysis at one's disposal in order to distinguish between different sources of variation among teachers (Malm & Lofgren, 2006, p.62). It is reasonable to assume that teacher competence is related to students' attitudes to school work and learning as well as students' self-confidence and self-conceptions. Although students' self-confidence and self-conceptions are dependent on many background conditions as well as on earlier school experiences, our understanding is that high teacher competence can lead to positive individual student development.

When students' perceptions are analyzed, it is found out that students vary regarding their perspectives of the teachers: 2nd year students are concerned with student centred issues such as motivation and classroom climate and by 5th year, these concerns have changed, to focus on instructional and management techniques (McCullough and Mintz, 1992). Unlike pre-service teachers, experienced teachers do tend to focus on the organizational and structural aspects of teaching (Kagan and Tippins, 1992). However, there are many teachers who prioritize classroom climate and positive student- teacher interaction. They think they are successful not due to their knowledge or expertise but due to their rapport between themselves and students (Hughes, 1994).

Perception, in this case, will be focused on the students' perception or opinion about the lecturers' cognitive, emotive, and skill performance and competence in teaching, whether the educational and personal background influence their performance and competence in teaching.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. This research itself aimed at gaining the data about the students' perception towards the lecturers' competence based on the educational background, gender, and age. In qualitative research, selecting the sample is the process of selecting the small number of individuals for a study so that the individual chosen will be able to help the researcher understand the phenomenon under the investigation. The purpose is to choose participants who will be good informants who have the ability to be



reflective and thoughtful, to communicate effectively with the researcher, and to be comfortable with the researcher's presence at the research site (Gay, 2006: 113). Before doing and selecting the participants as the sample of this research, the researcher observed and obtained information that was generally used to select participant which was suitable for this research topic and setting. The participants were 15 students of English Department Muhammadiyah University of Makassar selected randomly from each grade. The fourth year students consisted of 5 students since they had known most of the lecturers of English department; four students were selected from the third and second year, and two students from the first year since they were new to the situation and condition of the university.

The primary instrument of this study was the researcher herself. According to Mulyana (2001: 42), the position of the researcher is very important and complex because the researcher is as a planner, organizer, data collector, analyzer, interpreter, and at the end will be the reporter of his/her own research. The secondary instrument applied was the use of video camera to record the situation.

The data about this students' perception was obtained through interview. Gay et al. (2006: 418) said that interview is a purposeful interaction in which one person is trying to obtain information from another. Interviews permit researchers to obtain important data they couldn't require from observation alone.

In this research, the semi-structured interview was conducted. Gay et al, (2006: 419) state that semi-structured interview combines both structured and unstructured approaches. An unstructured interview is not to get answers to predetermined questions, but rather to find out where the participants are coming from and what they have experienced while in structured interviewed, the researcher has a specified set of questions that elicits specific information from the respondents. It allows the researcher to ask all of the participants the same series of questions.

Before doing the interview, firstly the researcher came and observed the situation so that the researcher could design a planning about how to conduct the interview and observation to gain the relevant data. It also became an opportunity to interact and socialize with the participants and explained to them that the



researcher was going to conduct a research and they were going to be observed as the participants of the research.

After selecting the research subject randomly, the interview was held to obtain the data about the students' perception toward the lecturers based on the background the lecturers' have. The interview was conducted for 5 minutes per student. Therefore, the researcher spent around 45 minutes to conduct the interview.

According to Gay (2006: 469), one way to proceed with the analysis is to follow three iterative or repeating steps: reading/memoing, describing what is going on in the setting, and classifying research data. The steps can be seen as follows:

1. Transcribing
2. Reading/memoing. As the first analytical step, all the observations, transcripts, and observer comments, either from interview or field notes will be read.
3. Describing. The next step, describing, involved developing comprehensive descriptions of the participants, the setting and, the phenomenon studied in order to convey the rich complexity of the research. The descriptions are based on the collected observations and interview data.
4. Classifying. The data analysis was basically a process of breaking down data into smaller units, determining their import, and putting the pertinent units together in a more general, analytical form. The typical way the data were broken down will be through the process of *coding*.
5. Interpreting the result of both field notes data from observation and interview data to be presented in the report.

FINDINGS

The data gathered from the interview are divided into the lecturers' competence and personality as summarized in the following table:



Competence	Personality
Having clear objectives	Teacher patience
Meeting needs of all levels of pupils	affectionate
Teacher enthusiasm	Caring and loving
Using interesting activities	enthusiastic
Stimulating learning environment	knowledgeable
Reinforcement/praise/rewards	Sense of humor
Linking motivation to learning	Fair to all students even to dislikeable students
Variety in lessons/teaching strategies	cheerful and friendly
Evaluating teaching/learning management	Motivating students
preparedness	Respecting students
	Creating a stress-free environment
	Providing a positive attitude

From the data gained from the interview the result of the study was divided into three areas:

1. The students' perception towards the lecturers' competence viewed from their educational qualifications.

Most of the students interviewed agreed that the lecturers who have Master degree are more competence than the others since they are very detailed in explaining the material. From 15 students interviewed, only 6 of them who believed that the lecturers with Professor and Doctor title are the most competence of all. They said that the professors and the doctor who ever taught them are only giving the topic to discuss and no detail explanation about the topic. While the lecturers with Bachelor degree are the least competence of all since sometimes they are not mastering the material they teach.

Most of the students perceived that the lecturers who have Master qualifications are more creative in designing the teaching and learning the process. They also agree that the teachers with Master degree have a better personality than the other. The lecturers are able to socialize with the students better than the other who have other qualifications.

2. The students' perception towards the lecturers' competence viewed from their personal background in terms of age.



When the students are asked about their perception of the lecturers competence based on their age, they can give good classification about senior and junior lecturers, old and young lecturers. Six students out of 15 perceived that actually the old or senior lecturers are more competence but they have a limitation in showing their competence. It could be because of their physical ability such as voice, body movement are no more as good as the young or junior lecturers.

Most students perceived that the younger teachers are more competence, active, prepared and creative. Nevertheless, the senior lecturers are more patient, affectionate, motivating students.

3. The students' perception towards the lecturers' competence viewed from their personal background in terms of gender.

When the students are asked to identify which one is more competence between male or female lecturers, they see that male lecturers are better in teaching skills, content knowledge, and dedication to teaching, and verbal skills. Meanwhile, they perceive the female lecturers as more friendly to the students, care about them, treat them respectfully, kindly and fairly, accessible not only in the class but also outside the class, and create a stress-free environment.

DISCUSSIONS

Students are concerned about the fine line between showing authority and creating a caring atmosphere in the class. They believe that they need care from lecturers, want to be understood, and maintain this perspective and meet the instructional requirements.

The results of this study do support previous findings (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Okpala & Ellis, 2005) that teacher quality is an important educational issue, and that teacher qualification is an important component of teacher quality. It is apparent from this study that quality teachers must embrace the vision of caring for students and their learning. The primary customers of educational organizations are the students, and quality teachers need to be committed to students and their learning goals. Quality teachers must have the ability to use a variety of instructional methods in their classroom to meet students' learning needs, create a relaxing environment and cater for the needs of students regarding language



learning, motivation, and interests. However, the effective side is thought to be the most important quality teachers should have. Students accept that they are responsible when they fail but believe that if teachers give them enough encouragement and positive feedback, this would increase their desire to study harder.

CONCLUSION

The research findings showed that the students perceived the lecturers with Master degree are more competence and have a good personality rather than lecturers with Bachelor Degree and Doctorate Degree viewed from their educational background. If they are viewed from their personal background in terms of age and gender, students perceived that male and young lecturers are more competence than female and old lecturers, but female and old lecturers have a better personality than male and young lecturers.

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