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QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE TEACHER – TEACHER AND LEARNER PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

Effective language teachers' characteristics have been studied in second language acquisition research for decades. However, the investigation of factors influencing the acquisition of a foreign language with a special emphasis on the teacher needs constant monitoring. This is due to several reasons, out of which three seem to be particularly important: firstly, studies of this variable, in contrast to other factors of foreign language teaching, are not too popular because of huge methodological effort of conducting them; secondly, factors dealing with the teacher are subject to constant changes influenced by social, political, economic and educational issues; thirdly, the concept of an "effective teacher" can be interpreted differently by different persons (Arikan 2003) because an "effective teacher" can refer to a person who produces high achievers or, by contrast, to a teacher who is positively received by his supervisors (Stronge 2002). In view of this, a number of questions arise: what is the perception of a contemporary foreign language teacher like? What qualities should characterise her most? Has the perception of the qualities of a good language teacher changed or remained the same? This article describes the results of a survey whose purpose was to address the above questions.

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1. The objectives of the survey

The researcher had two sets of objectives. First, the author wanted to specify what characteristics of a foreign language teacher are considered important for the people interested in the subject. Second, the author wanted to point out differences in valuing the particular characteristics, as perceived by different groups of respondents, and explain these differences.

2. The survey

The respondents were required to list the 6 most important characteristics that distinguish an effective language teacher. It was assumed, however, that the number “six” would not be treated absolutely and if respondents were willing to list more than six features, they could do so. Likewise, in the case of those listing only five characteristics, the answers were to be included in the results. However, it was decided that the respondents in which there were fewer than five characteristics would be rejected, on the basis that the respondents did not have much to say on the subject.

3. The respondents

It was decided that the respondents in the study would be people interested in teaching English, as well as those who learnt English intensively for several years prior to the time of the study. The respondents were simultaneously to be mature enough to have definite opinions on the process of foreign language teaching.

The respondents were divided into seven groups (A-G) distinguished by the level of their English teaching qualifications and their relation to the process of learning (teacher or student). The marking of particular groups, their description, the number of people investigated, as well as the total number of respondents are presented in *Table 1*. The respondents from group A came from different regions of Poland, whereas those from the remaining groups were mainly from the Pomorskie voivodeship.

Table 1. Groups of respondents

Group	Description	Number of respondents
A	Teacher trainers: INSETT leaders, methodological advisors and consultants	56
B	Qualified teachers of English working in secondary schools	31
C	Qualified teachers of English working in primary schools	30
D	English teachers working in primary or secondary schools completing their education in the extramural Teacher Training College	38
E	Teachers of other subjects who teach English with no formal qualifications for teaching English, and who are not completing their education in English	30
F	Regular Teacher Training College students	70
G	Secondary school leavers with an extended programme of English	35
Total:		290

4. Data collection

The questionnaires were distributed among the respondents from groups A to E during breaks at seminars, courses and conferences attended by the teachers. The students in groups F and G received the questionnaires at the beginning of lessons. This was arranged with the approval of the teachers conducting the classes. In some cases, especially with regard to the teachers from group E, who participate in training relatively rarely, the questionnaires were distributed individually, and the teachers were asked to fill them in on the spot.

Each completed questionnaire, immediately after having been received from the respondent, was marked by the author personally with one of the letters ranging from A to G. In this way, information about the group to which each respondent belonged was preserved.

5. The list of characteristics

After completion of the study, the questionnaires were sorted into groups A-G and numbered within these groups. Then, an initial list of all characteristics given by the respondents was drawn up. Each new feature was marked with a separate number and put on the general list of characteristics. In order to distinguish the meanings given for characteristics in the questionnaires from the meanings signifying these characteristics here, the following definitions were established:

source characteristic – the meaning given by a respondent in the questionnaire,

resultant characteristic – the meaning representing a set of source characteristics.

In the case where source characteristics included very similar meanings, they were treated as one resultant characteristic. Due to such treatment, resultant characteristics whose meanings were very similar were avoided. Moreover, the source characteristics given by the same respondent were not counted double. For instance, *the willingness to broaden one's knowledge* and *openness to novelty* given by the same person were counted as one resultant characteristic, that is *perfects her knowledge*. In the case where one source characteristic was too general to establish what the respondent meant, for instance "knowledge", it was written twice in two different resultant characteristics, that is *a good knowledge of language* and *an extensive knowledge of other subjects*.

In this way, 78 resultant characteristics were obtained. They were initially numbered in the order they appeared in when the data was copied from the questionnaires (marked as *original number* in Table 2). Hence, the order was random and resultant characteristics of similar meanings did not appear next to one another. To facilitate a further analysis, the order of resultant characteristics was changed so that the characteristics with similar meanings could be placed next to one another. Thus, the *resultant numeration of resultant characteristics* was created. A list of all resultant characteristics arranged according to numeration is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. A list of resultant characteristics

No.	Original No.	Name
1	1	A good knowledge of language
2	76	A good knowledge of grammar
3	25	A wide lexicon
4	11	Good phonetics
5	74	An extensive knowledge about language

No.	Original No.	Name
6	16	A good knowledge of target language culture
7	7	Methodologically prepared
8	52	Treats all skills equally
9	57	Uses pair/group work
10	32	Uses games in teaching
11	50	Pays attention to spoken language
12	60	Uses authentic materials
13	69	Uses technology in class
14	26	Creative
15	73	Has artistic abilities
16	56	Knows students' mother tongue well
17	61	Corrects student errors skilfully
18	30	Uses different methods and techniques
19	49	Aware of aims which she wants to accomplish
20	46	Always prepared for lessons
21	53	A good psychologist
22	22	Communicative
23	2	A friendly attitude to students
24	13	Approachable
25	27	Empathetic
26	28	Listens to students
27	33	Individualises her work with students
28	47	Makes lessons interesting
29	5	Motivates to autonomous work
30	66	Takes care of good communication among learners
31	44	Praises correct student responses
32	40	Nice and pleasant
33	38	Knows students' names
34	70	Not stressful
35	62	Willing to help after lessons
36	71	Resilient
37	41	Does not reveal complexes
38	36	Uses body language
39	78	A good pedagogue
40	75	Supports the global development of a learner
41	35	Conveys her knowledge well
42	37	Has a good assessment system
43	51	Works with all students
44	58	Gives feedback
45	48	Devotes time to revision
46	31	Maintains discipline in the classroom
47	63	A good pace of lessons
48	65	A good organiser, manager

No.	Original No.	Name
49	4	Patient
50	72	Reflective
51	15	Honest, fair
52	20	Involved
53	21	Consistent
54	17	Responsible
55	8	Firm
56	45	Admits her mistakes
57	3	A positive attitude to profession
58	55	Punctual
59	29	Demanding
60	67	Genuine
61	24	Cultured
62	6	Self-critical
63	68	Follows fashion
64	42	Optimistic
65	43	Pleased with life
66	19	Experienced
67	77	Practical
68	9	Flexible
69	14	Perfects her knowledge
70	64	Maintains a distance in relations with students
71	10	An extensive knowledge in other subjects
72	12	Intelligent
73	18	A sense of humour
74	23	Split attention
75	34	Enjoys authority
76	39	Well-organised
77	59	Energetic
78	54	A nice appearance

6. Interpretation of the frequency of characteristics

In order to use the collected research data maximally, all the features characterising excellent language teachers, as named by the questionnaire respondents, will be considered. In other words, the author will attempt to find reasons for the appearance of characteristics in a given group of respondents.

A good knowledge of language (characteristic 1) turns out to be the most frequently named characteristic of an effective teacher, scoring on average over

60%. This seems to mean that a successful foreign language teacher is a successful language user. The greatest percentage (almost 80%) of this characteristic is given by the respondents of groups A and B. It also scores 60%, among the respondents of groups D, F and G, taking first place of all characteristics in these groups. It is only for the teachers from group C and unqualified teachers from group E that this characteristic does not come first. A good knowledge of language seems to be a priority for the best educated groups of teachers, students and school leaving examination takers of linguistically-profiled classes. English teachers without qualifications, as well as primary school teachers, consider other teacher characteristics equally important or more important than knowledge of the language. Thereby, they may exhibit a desire to excuse their relatively low qualifications. The teachers from group C, of low professional education (without MA) and the teachers from group E, holding no qualifications to teach English, may be excusing themselves for their own professional situation.

A good knowledge of grammar (characteristic 2) is perceived as important by day students and, to a very small extent, by school graduates and teacher trainers. The other groups ignore this characteristic.

A wide lexicon (characteristic 3), just like the previous characteristic, is treated marginally. The respondents of groups B, C and D do not list it at all. Probably most people treat characteristic 2 and characteristic 3 as component parts of characteristic 1, and this is why both characteristic 2 and characteristic 3 fail to achieve a high score.

Good phonetics (characteristic 4) occupies one of the primary places among the school leaving examination takers, scoring over 35%, as well as among teachers completing their education in TTCs, scoring almost 30%. The results of examination takers with reference to characteristic 4 confirm the results quoted by Harmer (1991: 6), according to whom secondary school French respondents hold foreign language teachers' good pronunciation in high regard. It also transpires that Polish students, despite the existence of a variety of English language accents and many definitions of "correctness" (Kenworthy 1987) may want to be taught the standard dictionary pronunciation. The popularity of this characteristic among the teachers completing their education probably originates from their own experience. Only now are those teachers being taught the language, including its sounds, formally. It also happens that only now do a lot of them "discover" the correct stress of a particular word, another intonation from the one hitherto used by them, or even the proper pronunciation of a vowel or a consonant. They usually appreciate this newly-received knowledge very much, and probably pay more and more attention to the phonetics of a foreign language in order to teach it well.

A good knowledge about language (characteristic 5) occupies about 10% in all groups but the last one. Secondary school students probably do not realise

the importance of knowledge about language for a foreign language teacher and this is why characteristic 5 is treated marginally by the school leaving examination takers.

A good knowledge of target language culture (characteristic 6), occupies about 10% in all groups but group G. Teachers and students learning teaching seem to appreciate cultural competence more, and regard it as part of linguistic competence. Students, on the other hand, do not always realise that knowledge of a foreign language also implies a knowledge of the target language culture, and this is probably why their appreciation of this characteristic is lower.

Methodologically prepared (characteristic 7) turns out to be one of the leading characteristics given by the respondents. This characteristic is the most frequently named by the qualified teachers, that is trainers and secondary school teachers (over 40%), receiving about 30% support in the other groups. The results confirm that the best educated teachers perceive the importance of familiarity with the methodology of the subject taught. This characteristic is, however, less favourably received by those who do not teach, that is college and school students. Probably among groups F and G, that is groups intensively studying the foreign language, the awareness of importance of methodological preparation of the teacher is lower because of their inferior knowledge in this area. Besides, learners perceive language learning from a different perspective. For them, it is important to learn the language effectively, whereas teaching methods are less important as long as they are not boring and lead to the final goal.

Treats all skills equally (characteristic 8) gains a marginal position among the respondents of groups C and F. The subjects from the other groups do not list this characteristic at all.

Uses pair and group work (characteristic 9) is not held in high regard by the respondents. Only unqualified teachers give this characteristic about 10%.

Uses games in teaching (characteristic 10) is not acknowledged by the respondents. The respondents of groups A, D, E, F, G list this characteristic sporadically, whereas the qualified teachers of primary and secondary schools leave it out.

Pays attention to the spoken language (characteristic 11) is very much appreciated by unqualified teachers (almost 20%) and slightly less (over 10%) by the respondents from groups D and F. The others treat this feature marginally. It is hard to say why unqualified foreign language teachers pay more attention to the spoken language than the other subjects. Perhaps the speaking skill is the skill most frequently practised in their lessons. A lot of the subjects from group E learnt the language while living in an English-speaking country, and perhaps this is why they perceive this feature as a relatively easy one. Moreover, due to the presence of the communicative method with its emphasis on speaking in most

English teaching course books used in Polish schools, teachers from group E may feel encouraged to perceive this skill as more important than the other ones.

Uses authentic materials (characteristic 12) is marginally acknowledged by all the respondents except group C. The qualified teachers from primary schools do not mention this characteristic in their typologies at all. They may know from experience that using authentic materials in teaching English in primary schools is often impossible because the level of linguistic knowledge of their pupils is usually too low.

Uses technology in class (characteristic 13) is not popular among the respondents, although groups B, E, F, G give more points to this characteristic than the other groups. The very meaning of “technology” is not identically understood by everyone. Looking through the data, it can be inferred that the teachers listing their source characteristics apply such phrases as “audio-visual aids” or “radio, television, cassette”. For younger respondents of groups F and G, however, using technology equals “using the internet”. Thus, it can be concluded that the choice of characteristics also reflects the ability to use a technical invention effectively.

Creative (characteristic 14), that is an innovative and resourceful teacher, is the most acknowledged by school leaving examination takers, who put this characteristic in third place, and the least acknowledged by the teachers with no qualifications. A high correlation of this characteristic with the results given by the secondary school students probably derives from the fact that young people, fond of changes and individualism, appreciate teachers who are creative, full of ideas, with a lot of imagination and fantasy. For the young, creativity may equal lack of monotony and boredom. On the other hand, the low percentage of this characteristic given by the teachers formally unprepared to do their jobs may be dictated by their willingness to excuse themselves. In their understanding, creativity may mean using variety of teaching ideas, which they were not formally taught, or do not know how to invent by themselves.

Has artistic abilities (characteristic 15), typical of teachers with musical, manual and artistic talent, is listed very infrequently by the responding teachers and not at all by the other subjects. Secondary school examination takers and students of English TTC, the people whose command of language is relatively high, may not value the use of songs or drama in their lessons, which are often associated with playing, rather than learning. Thus, the teacher with an artistic ability may not necessarily prove indispensable in the case of teaching advanced users of language.

Knows students' native language (characteristic 16) is listed only once by a teacher from group D. The other respondents ignore this feature, which seems to be obvious considering the fact that most English language teachers in Poland are native speakers of Polish.

Knows how to correct mistakes (characteristic 17) is treated marginally by groups C, E, F and G. The other respondents do not list this feature at all.

Uses different methods and techniques (characteristic 18) is most highly regarded by the unqualified teachers and the regular students, and relatively highly by the secondary school teachers (over 20%) and the students (on average 20%). Using a variety of methods and teaching techniques, so highly regarded by the unqualified teachers, may derive from the fact that they themselves, supported by a whole gamut of course books and other materials offered by foreign book publishers, may use a multitude of activities in their lessons. Variety of methods and techniques influences the attractiveness of lessons, which obtains recognition among recipients, that is the respondents of groups F and G. The fact that this characteristic does not seem to be very popular among the trainers may indicate that the most advanced professionally teachers realise that the mere multiplicity of exercises is not sufficient to ensure the conditions for effective teaching.

Aware of the aims that she wants to accomplish (characteristic 19) is not generally acknowledged, although unequivocal, clear and precise formulation of aims is often a prerequisite for effective action. Most respondents of the particular groups hardly name this feature, and the respondents of group D do not list it at all.

Always prepared for the lesson (characteristic 20) is a feature considered to be extremely important in Harmer's (1991) and Scrivener's (1994) research. In this study, however, characteristic 20 is acknowledged only by group D, whose respondents give it more than 20%. The teachers from group C give the preparation for the lesson almost 20%, but the other groups treat this feature marginally, and the respondents of group E do not name it at all. From the data obtained, it transpires that the preparation of the teacher for lessons is relatively important in the primary school.

A good psychologist (characteristic 21) gains the most recognition among the respondents of group E. The other respondents mention this characteristic sporadically, and teacher trainers, secondary school teachers and students do not write it at all. The fact of mentioning of this feature by the primary teachers and the unqualified teachers, who usually work in primary education, suggests that being a good psychologist is more significant to language teachers of younger learners than to those working with secondary school students.

Communicative (characteristic 22) occupies the second place among the most frequently named characteristics of an effective teacher. This characteristic is considered the most important by teachers without qualifications, and the third most important feature for primary school teachers.

In the contemporary Polish literature relating to the study of the teacher the problem of the communication between the teacher and the learner, espe-

cially in the face of the educational reform, has received the highest attention. Teaching in the communicative mode, particularly through the use of projects and pair and group work, has extended to the methodology of other subjects, and this is why it should amount to a frequent topic of discussion at teachers' meetings and forums of professional development. This is probably why characteristic 22 appears to be prominent among the practising teachers working in schools. They appreciate the fact that establishing contact with a learner and "opening" him/her to the language is indispensable if teaching the language is to be effective. A low rating of this characteristic among the trainers probably originates from the fact that the issue of teacher communicativeness has been highlighted in the methodology of foreign language teaching since the 80s (the development of The Communicative Method) and is not a new concept. Well-informed on the latest tendencies of English language teaching methodology in the world, teacher trainers consider other features to be more important. Moreover, the lack of experience of a typical classroom on a daily basis provides a reason why the teacher trainers may less appreciate the significance of teacher-student rapport, and why they may place it well behind the other respondents. College students, however, taught by their trainers how to teach, frequently copy the views of their teachers.

A friendly attitude to students (characteristic 23) receives over 20% among all the respondents. It is most highly regarded by the respondents of group E and the teacher trainers (30%). A slightly lower percentage is accorded by the group of secondary school teachers, school leaving examination takers (over 20%), evening students (hardly 20%), followed by regular students and primary school teachers (over 10%). Interestingly, although characteristic 23 receives more acknowledgement among the regular students than the primary teachers, the regular students, being students themselves, rate it lower than, for instance, their teachers from group A. According to the regular students, *a positive attitude to the profession* is considered to be more important than a positive attitude to learners. They replace a positive attitude to students with such characteristics as *individualises her work with students*, *motivates to autonomous work* or being *empathetic*.

Approachable (characteristic 24) obtains 20% among the unqualified teachers only. The remaining groups of respondents treat this characteristic differently: the secondary school teachers and the teacher trainers give it slightly more than 10%, groups D, F, G about 5%, and the primary school teachers 0%. It is difficult to explain why the teachers without preparation for foreign language teaching pay more attention to this feature than the other groups. Perhaps they believe that teacher qualifications cannot be substituted for teacher approachability, which makes the learner feel secure and uninhibited to ask for teacher help any time he/she needs.

Empathetic (characteristic 25) is acknowledged as a significant feature by all the groups and on average scores approximately 30%. The greatest recognition for this characteristic, however, is seen among the primary school and unqualified teachers. The secondary school teachers give empathy the lowest percentage – on average twice or three times lower than the others. The results obtained indicate that empathy seems to be most important for primary school teachers. Among secondary school teachers, being empathetic may still be associated with not being demanding and, therefore, signify a low level of teaching.

Listens to students (characteristic 26) is acknowledged most among the regular students, trainers and examination takers. Contemporary young people, that is the foreign language learners from groups F and G, probably think that the learner in a democratic Polish school should have every right to decide about what he/she wants to learn. Relatively much support for this characteristic demonstrated by the teacher trainers seems to confirm this conviction (cf. Jaatinen 2001; Lehtovaara 2001).

Individualises her work with students (characteristic 27) is the most highly appreciated by the students from group F and, subsequently, by the trainers, primary school teachers and evening students. The school students, however, do not appear to consider this quality particularly important. The high percentage allocated by the college students and the low percentage by the school students clearly indicate that individualisation in secondary schools is not much appreciated by students. Perhaps it is not frequently employed by teachers, which makes students, ignorant of this characteristic, depreciate its significance. As they read more methodological literature and have more teaching experience, which occurs among college students, the awareness of the significance of this characteristic is fundamentally increased.

Makes lessons interesting (characteristic 28) is the second most important feature in terms of significance in the opinion of examination takers. The other groups assess it in two ways: the unqualified teachers and the regular students allocate it 30%, the other groups of respondents about 10%. Conducting interesting lessons, just like being *creative*, seems to be understandable in the lists of the school students who highly appreciate the ability to attract their attention and make them interested in the lesson topic. Likewise, regular students, experiencing this characteristic themselves to a greater or lesser extent during their college classes, hold it in high respect. Teachers without qualifications are probably convinced of the fact that a foreign language teacher, irrespective of her qualifications, should conduct interesting lessons. Then her students are pleased and, in consequence, the teacher is pleased. The ability to make the topic interesting is rated lower by the qualified teachers. This perhaps might be explained by the fact that conducting interesting lessons is associated with having fun, and not

everything that appears effective is always effective from the perspective of an increase in student knowledge.

Motivates to autonomous work (characteristic 29) is not equally important for everyone. The primary school teachers appreciate this characteristic the most highly, the school and regular college students, as well as the trainers, regard it relatively highly, whereas the teachers studying in evening colleges rate this feature much lower. The high discrepancy among the respondents suggests a lack of agreement with reference to this characteristic. Probably the understanding of this characteristic by the particular groups is different, which, in turn, influences the result obtained. The primary school teachers, granting it over 30%, may have in mind the number of homework assignments which, according to them, could motivate pupils to autonomous work. The confirmation of this hypothesis could be in the very general responses found in group C questionnaires, such as “inspires learners to work”, “motivates to work”. Among the extramural teachers, who have a course in *English Language Teaching Methodology* at least once a week, the phrases are more precise, and on this account lend themselves better to other characteristics (for example, *makes lessons interesting*). Teacher trainers probably understand this characteristic still differently, which is indicated by the use of such questionnaire phrases as “develops learner autonomy”, and “ability to teach learning strategies”.

Takes care of good communication among students in class (characteristic 30) is listed by one respondent from group F. Interestingly, in the times of acknowledgement of “co-operative teaching” (Kohonen *et al.* 2001) and the importance of group dynamics (cf. Hadfield 1992), often stressed in language teaching manuals for teachers, this characteristic is not mentioned in the remaining groups.

Praises correct responses (characteristic 31) is not significantly recognised, although out of all the subjects, the unqualified teachers list it more often than the others.

Nice and friendly (characteristic 32) is a characteristic which is mostly mentioned by the primary school teachers, followed by the secondary school students. The evening students, as well as the teachers completing their qualifications, appear to attach more importance to this characteristic than the respondents of groups A, B and F. It transpires that perhaps primary school teachers perceive the significance of teacher personal qualities more. Although the secondary school students would see it differently, an effective teacher in the secondary school is still perceived as a good instructor, or a teacher of the subject. In the primary school, however, a good teacher is above all a nice and friendly person.

Knows students' first names (characteristic 33), although obvious, is listed only by the secondary school teachers and, for obvious reasons, by the students.

Not stressful (characteristic 34) is most accepted among the students and the unqualified teachers. Interestingly, no primary school teacher from group C considers this feature significant. The appreciation of this characteristic by the students seems to be understandable. Its omission by teachers from group C may mean that a certain dose of stress, the so called "facilitating anxiety" (cf. Brown 1994), can be necessary for younger students.

Willing to help after lessons (characteristic 35) is a characteristic which gains hardly 10% among all the respondents. Since this characteristic is more acknowledged by the primary teachers and the unqualified teachers working mainly in primary schools, giving help to pupils after classes seems to be more important among younger learners.

Resilient (characteristic 36) receives hardly 10% support from the subjects. This feature is not at all recognised by the secondary school teachers, or regular students.

Does not reveal her complexes (characteristic 37) is named by some respondents from groups A, B, D, F and G. Teacher complexes are usually evoked by her dislike of the job performed, the specificity of language teaching methodology, teacher-student rapport, relations between the teacher and other people involved in the educational process, and the constant assessment by students, their parents and supervisors. The highest emphasis for this characteristic is found among the secondary school teachers, although it is not significant.

Makes use of body language (characteristic 38) is listed only twice. Hence, the application of non-verbal aspects in language teaching is treated marginally by the respondents in this study.

A good pedagogue (characteristic 39) turns out to be an outstanding feature among the characteristics listed by the school students and appears prominently among the remaining groups. However, the respondents of group A define their characteristics more precisely, whereas the secondary school examination takers, probably unaware of certain definitions (for instance, "methodologically prepared", "linguistic skills"), select more general notions that are familiar to them.

Supports the global development of a learner (characteristic 40) is mentioned only once. This is why definite acknowledgement for this characteristic cannot be inferred, although a global development of the learner is one of fundamental objectives of the new educational reform in Poland.

Conveys her knowledge well (characteristic 41), although held in high regard by most respondents, is the least appreciated by the teacher trainers. The art of clear and accurate expression, grasping and articulating arguments, as well as conveying knowledge in a comprehensible manner, seems to be an obvious task of the teacher, and probably this is why characteristic 41 is not perceived as one of the most important features by the latter.

Has a good assessment system (characteristic 42) is not thought to be significant by most of the respondents. The secondary school teachers, for example, do not put forward this feature in their lists at all. This seems surprising because a course in criterion-referenced measurement is frequently an obligatory teacher course imposed and paid for by principals of many a secondary school in Poland.

Works with all students (characteristic 43) gains over 10% among the day students exclusively. This group of respondents, who are still students, may be more sensitive to the devotion of equal time to all. Group G, whose respondents are also students, name this feature less often, although more frequently than the teachers from the other groups.

Gives feedback (characteristic 44) is not highlighted by the respondents. Although most often mentioned by the teacher trainers, this characteristic is treated as not too significant by most respondents.

Devotes time to revision (characteristic 45) does not receive considerable support among the subjects. Qualified teachers of English do not list this characteristic, probably considering it to be obvious.

Maintains discipline in class (characteristic 46), does not receive a high percentage among the participants of the groups investigated. However, the fact that the teachers working in primary schools, rather than the representatives of the other groups, list this feature more often, deserves attention. Seen in this light, it might be concluded that discipline problems in language class are, in the opinions of the respondents, mainly encountered in primary schools.

A good pace of the lesson (characteristic 47) is treated marginally by all respondents.

A good manager (characteristic 48) is the characteristic which, although rather unpopular, is more frequently named by the respondents of group B. This seems to be brought about through the rising popularity of organising trips and summer courses abroad listed among the source characteristics in this group. Therefore, secondary school teachers appear to be users of this characteristic more often than the other respondents.

Patient (characteristic 49) rates on average almost 30%. Patience turns out to be the most desirable characteristic among the teachers from groups C, D and E, as well as the students from groups F and G. Among the subjects surveyed, the teacher trainers list this characteristic the most rarely. On the basis of the results obtained it seems that a foreign language teacher's patience is more necessary in the primary school, which is confirmed by the high percentage given by groups C, D and E. The fact that teacher trainers treat this characteristic marginally, regarding other teacher traits as more important, suggests that either the characteristic *patient* is so obvious that it does not need to be mentioned, or that

they are so remote from the school reality that they forget the importance of being patient at school.

Reflective (characteristic 50) is mentioned only by the trainers and several regular students. This characteristic, clearly highlighted in the contemporary language teaching literature (Wallace 1991; Richards and Lockhart 1994) is in this survey treated marginally. The results clearly indicate that, in opposition to the contemporary trends, “reflectivity” is not perceived as a dominant characteristic of an effective teacher by the groups surveyed. Teacher trainers, well read in contemporary methodological developments, turn out to be almost the only group conscious of the existence of this feature. However, even they attach less importance to this characteristic, perceiving others as more prominent.

Fair, honest (characteristic 51) receives the highest recognition among the regular and evening students as well as school leaving examination takers. In comparison with the other respondents, the teacher trainers give “honesty” the smallest percentage. Because of the learner’s role, it seems understandable that a “fair” teacher seems to appeal mostly to those who learn, that is students. The trainers give this characteristic a lower percentage, probably failing to acknowledge the thought that the teacher may be unjust.

Involved (characteristic 52) is a characteristic which attracts the primary school teachers’ and teacher trainers’ attention. The remaining groups pay less attention to this feature, giving it on average about 10%. Analysing the teachers’ utterances, it is striking that in the case of both groups appreciating teacher involvement, their views follow two directions. The primary school teachers use such phrases as “involved in work”, “hard-working”, “devoted” more often, whereas the teacher trainers make more frequent use of designations such as “diligent”, “doing her work meticulously”, and “disciplined”. Therefore, being involved signifies being engaged in something as well as being extremely careful in performing one’s job.

Consistent (characteristic 53) is the characteristic which is regarded as the second most important characteristic of the primary school teachers, who give it as much as 50%. Apart from the school students, for whom this feature amounts to several per cent, the other groups assess it more favourably, giving it around 20%. Being consistent is not highly appreciated by the school graduates because they probably do not realise the importance of this characteristic. The other professional groups are occupied with teaching or getting practical knowledge of how to teach on internship practices, and, therefore, understand how extremely significant teacher consistency at school seems to be in the teaching profession. Perhaps a “consistent” teacher is more needed in the primary school than in schools of higher educational level.

Responsible (characteristic 54), Firm (characteristic 55), Admits her mistakes (characteristic 56) do not receive considerable support among the respondents. Probably these characteristics are not perceived as the most important qualities that characterise good teachers of English. Being an adult person, the teacher should be “responsible” on principle, and “firmness” can signify “blind obstinacy” in a pejorative sense, whereas frequent “admitting mistakes” may be associated with a lack of formal preparation. It seems that students would rather the teacher did not make mistakes for which she would have to apologise afterwards.

A positive attitude to teaching (characteristic 57) is a characteristic generally supported by all the respondents except for the secondary school leavers. A positive attitude to the work performed seems to be obvious – the very choice of the profession by a teacher should be dictated by conviction, rather than mere chance. For the school pupils it is still a remote issue because, in their opinion, people probably do not perform a job professionally unless they like it.

Punctual (characteristic 58) emerges as being of doubtful quality, in so far as it is hardly recognised. Perhaps the respondents perceive punctuality as a human trait, not the most significant among the six features of an effective teacher.

Demanding (characteristic 59) scores very highly in the secondary school teachers, both school and college regular students. It transpires that the students would like their teachers to check the student’s knowledge meticulously, probably supposing that frequent quizzes and tests will make them learn more.

Genuine, congruent (characteristic 60) receives high emphasis by the qualified secondary school teachers only. Probably students in the secondary school can notice the teacher’s lack of genuineness if she pretends to be someone she is not more easily than the other groups, who do not mention this feature, or treat it marginally.

Cultured (characteristic 61) is noticed by all the groups, nevertheless amounting only to 4%.

Self-critical (characteristic 62) is pointed out by the better qualified respondents, receiving 3% in total.

Follows the fashion (characteristic 63), *optimistic* (characteristic 64), *pleased with life* (characteristic 65) are features given by single respondents. Their appearance on the list of teacher characteristics can be considered accidental.

Experienced (characteristic 66), like the ones mentioned right above, surprisingly hardly appears. This may mean that teachers, irrespective of their age, can teach equally well. The teachers’ knowledge typical of the former system of education, which did not require further professional development, did not increase proportionally to the years of being a teacher. Apart from the group of teacher trainers, comprising the majority of respondents at the age of 30 to 45,

the respondents from the other groups do not exceed the age of 30 in most cases. Nevertheless, even the teacher trainers do not opt for this feature significantly. While teaching experience can certainly have a significant impact on some classroom procedures, the surveys point out that many aspects of being an effective teacher do not seem to be affected by this factor.

Practical (characteristic 67) does not turn out to be a popular feature. Although useful in life, this characteristic does not seem to be one of the most important characteristics of a language teacher.

Flexible (characteristic 68) is named by the trainers and the regular students the most frequently. A high perception of this feature by the respondents of group F seems interesting. Perhaps such opinions are influenced by Harmer's (1991) book for foreign English language teachers, still extremely popular in teacher training colleges, in which "flexibility", alongside "variety", is emphasised as a desirable characteristic of an English teacher (ibid.: 258). The extramural students, however, with a more critical attitude to theory which they can check against everyday teaching practice, treat teacher flexibility more carefully, listing other characteristics more often. On the other hand, a higher awareness of this characteristic expressed by the teachers of secondary and higher education perhaps suggests a greater need for its presence among the teachers working in secondary and higher schools.

Perfects her knowledge (characteristic 69) is best received by the teacher trainers who gave it 50% support. The second group of supporters is found among trained secondary school teachers. The remaining groups support it to a smaller degree, yet considerably. The trainers, the group best oriented in new teaching trends due to their job, realise the necessity of increasing qualifications best. As they are the group responsible for perfecting other teachers' knowledge, they may also be interested in justifying their continued professional existence. Qualified secondary school teachers, observing a constant increase in the linguistic level of learners who come to secondary schools and higher requirements of entrance examinations with reference to the knowledge of English among the applicants for higher studies, also appreciate the importance of constant increasing of professional competencies. For secondary school students, for whom the issue of increasing professional qualifications is totally alien, this characteristic understandably does not appear to feature strongly at present.

Maintains distance in teacher-student relations (characteristic 70) receives hardly any support among the respondents.

An extensive knowledge of other subjects (characteristic 71) receives considerable support from the teacher trainers and the regular students. The reason probably lies in the fact that teacher trainers notice that the interdisciplinary nature of subjects and the necessity of familiarity with other fields of knowledge

is increasingly useful in foreign language teaching. Students, in turn, acquiring their knowledge of language and teaching in the course of their studies from their trainers, also seem to appreciate the globality of teaching more and more, and perceive the inadequacies of too narrow a specialisation.

Intelligent (characteristic 72) does not really figure in the rankings of the respondents surveyed. Some respondents do not name this characteristic at all.

A sense of humour (characteristic 73) wins the greatest approval (20%) among the teacher trainers. The other groups estimate its significance much lower.

Split attention (characteristic 75) is listed by few respondents. Thus, the presence of this characteristic in an effective teacher does not appear to be significant.

Enjoys authority (characteristic 75) turns out to be an important characteristic for the respondents in group B. The teachers from this group seem to point out that the necessity of forming features that help create teacher authority is crucial. Because other respondents give this characteristic less acknowledgement, charisma seems to be most important in the period of crystallising the young person's points of view – a secondary school learner in most cases.

Well-organised (characteristic 76), like characteristic 75, is more emphasised by qualified teachers of secondary schools. This characteristic, although extremely useful in the life of every person, could be the most necessary when teaching young people.

Energetic (characteristic 77) is listed by a few respondents from groups B, C and D. Although the presence of this feature is desirable in any teacher, because an energetic teacher can attract students' attention well, the marginal treatment of this characteristic here results from little importance attributed to it.

The possession of a *nice appearance* (characteristic 78) in a language teacher is a very individual matter, and probably this is why characteristic 78 is hardly supported by the respondents. The fact whether a teacher has much influence upon her appearance is also a highly debatable issue. Hence, characteristic 78 is not perceived as significant for the purposes of this study.

Concluding remarks

To sum up the frequency of characteristics named by the respondents of seven groups, it can be stated that the most popular are 10 characteristics which on average amount to 20%, that is: *a good knowledge of language* (among all the respondents), *communicative* (groups: B, C, D, E), *methodologically pre-*

pared (among all the respondents in varying degrees), *empathetic* (groups: D, F), *patient* (groups: D, G), *creative* (groups: A, C, D, G), *fair* (groups: B, C, D, E, G), *consistent* (groups: B, C, D, E, F), who *makes lessons interesting* (groups: E, F, G) and *perfects her knowledge* (groups: A, B). Interestingly, they resemble Komorowska's (1984) study conducted more than 20 years ago in which the teacher's linguistic skills (*a good knowledge of language*), interpersonal skills (*communicative* and *empathetic*) and being fair (*fair*) are regarded as being of the highest importance among features motivating students to work. However, in Komorowska's research, poor methodological preparation of the teacher is one of the two factors responsible for discouraging students from learning a language, which seems to point out that the characteristic *methodologically prepared* received indirect support among the subjects already in her study. In view of this, it may be concluded that certain characteristics of an effective language teacher have lost none of their immediate importance despite a lapse of almost thirty years.

On the other hand, the respondents fail to identify or strongly emphasise the very qualities deemed important in language teacher education nowadays, such as teacher empowerment, teacher autonomy (Sinclair et al. 2000) and teacher reflectivity (Farrell 2007), formative assessment of students (Clarke 2005), including the use of language portfolio (Komorowska 2004) and self-assessment (Wysocka 1998), developing European values, that is multicultural competence (Zawadzka 2004) and ICT teaching (Grenfell et al 2003) or supporting the idea of language classroom as a learning community (Witkins 2005). Therefore, the findings of this study certainly precipitate into further research in order to see how significant these and other teacher characteristics are for different levels of education and, perhaps, larger groups of respondents.

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ABSTRACT

The investigation of factors influencing the acquisition of a foreign language with a special emphasis on the teacher needs constant monitoring. This is due to the following reasons: (1) studies of this variable, in contrast to other factors of foreign language teaching, are not too popular because of huge methodological effort of conducting them; (2) factors dealing with the teacher are subject to constant changes influenced by social, political, economic and educational issues; (3) the concept of an “effective teacher” can be interpreted differently by different persons.

This article discusses yet another study on the qualities of an effective teacher of English as perceived by 7 groups of Polish subjects – all interested in successful language learning. The respondents give as many as 78 features which are discussed with reference to subjects' preferences. Finally, a list of 10 most popular good teacher characteristics is presented, which can provide an insight into a contemporary image of an effective English language teacher.