

Personal and Professional Qualities of Effective English Teachers in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study developed a profile of an effective English teacher in the context of Philippine public secondary schools. The mixed methods design used the interview, observation, and survey to explore the personal and professional practices of 22 purposively sampled English teachers in the top five high achieving public schools in Cavite. The qualitative data were analysed using Qualitative Data Analysis Model of Serdet as cited in Lim (2008). Two effective English teacher models were developed: Personal Qualities (PERQ) and Professional Qualities (PROQ) from the emerging themes inherent in the teacher practices. Results showed that an effective English teacher is purpose-driven, language learning-focused, concerned for students' overall welfare, highly family-oriented, connected to God, well-informed in their area of teaching, articulate, organized and prepared, student-centered, committed to teaching, adaptable and teachable, willing to learn, resilient, and optimistic. Neither age nor years of teaching created a significant difference in teachers' personal and professional practices. Married teachers were more likely to engage in practices leading toward professional growth than singles. Teachers whose highest educational attainment was a Bachelor's degree were more involved in practices pertaining to family than teachers with credits towards a Master's degree. Personal and professional qualities were found to have stemmed from personal and professional practices, respectively. Although the two models separately classify teachers' personal and professional qualities, together, these comprise the profile of an effective English teacher. This study highlighted the importance of the components of a teacher's personal life—personal mission and philosophy, routines and hobbies, health habits, family life and spirituality—in excellent teaching performance. It is recommended that all teachers be given sufficient support to achieve this level of teaching success; that teachers of other disciplines be encouraged to improve the personal areas indicated, as this is associated with professional effectiveness; that effective teachers be trained to mentor average and/or novice teachers; and that the Department of Education (DepEd) put adequate provisions in place to help public school teachers balance their personal and professional lives towards teaching effectiveness and the consequent betterment of the Philippine public education system in general.

KEYWORDS: Effective teaching, English teachers, personal qualities, professional qualities

Introduction

Teaching has been considered to be a noble profession because it has the possibility of significantly affecting not only the intellectual but also the personal development of individuals. Not only that an act of teaching is to be conducted but it must be carried out well to achieve its purpose of creating good impact upon the learners. White (1952) affirms that “the true teacher is not satisfied with second-rate work. He is not satisfied with directing his students to a standard lower than the highest which is possible for them to attain” (p. 29).

Factors identifying good teachers may be relative but there are characteristics of good teaching that manifest total commitment in the teacher. Undoubtedly, teachers’ beliefs and total personality affect the way they perform their professional duties. Their innate or cultivated personal qualities affect, whether they realize it or not, the manner in which they teach. Indeed there are emerging qualities that serve as hallmarks of the best teaching (Bain, 2004; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2003; Waters, 2006). Also, Cain (2007) posits that the art of good teaching is a synergistic blend of three factors: teacher, theory, and practice.

English language teaching (ELT) poses various challenges in this contemporary age of education whether in a first language or second language context. Language teachers such as Filipino teachers of English face the challenge of dealing with the intricate nature of ELT, as it can be integrated across other core school disciplines. In essence, English language instruction is versatile enough to encompass all that there is in school—the total schooling experience (Vizconde, 2006).

Language barriers or language deficiency among second language learners and poor vocabulary among native language users have often been cited as the underlying causes of student failure (Brown, 1995; Choo, 2007; Dekker, 2003; Waters & Vilches, 2008). Learners with language difficulty are often the source of teacher anxiety (Johns & Espinoza, 1996).

Philippines is known to be highly proficient in English as compared to its neighbouring countries in the Southeast Asian region. However, the introduction of bilingualism in 1974 and its re-establishment in 1987 have been blamed for the deterioration of Filipinos’ English proficiency. Despite the disagreements from those who strongly desire to uphold the national language (Filipino) to be dominantly used in business and education, Filipinos have long benefited from ELT educationally, politically, and economically (Padua, 2005).

Other formal and informal surveys and observations have already been conducted supporting the general view of the perceived decline of English proficiency in the Philippines (Conde, Gamba, & Llanto, 2007). Conde et al. (2007) cited a study conducted by the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines which showed that “75 percent of the more than 400,000 Filipino students that graduate from college each year have substandard English skills” (para. 5). The Philippine education system is currently experiencing a downward spiral. It is also alarming that over 97% of high school students failed in the most recent National Achievement Test (NAT) annually administered among high school students, focusing on three subject areas: English, Math and Science (Dumlao, 2006).

Reports of declining standards of secondary education (Dumlao, 2006; Gonzales, 1996) suggest that better teachers should be employed. Real problems go beyond the logistical problems in the public education system—improvement in teacher quality has to be prioritized, since student academic success greatly relies on teacher competence and

commitment (Tenedoro, 2005). Therefore in an effort to alleviate the problem, the DepEd has allocated a special budget for the training of English teachers toward English proficiency.

A pressing need has been felt for the development of English language proficiency among secondary students. The cause of failure is often attributed to poor or not fully developed linguistic skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and other micro language skills that are equally important such as thinking skills (Vizconde, 2006; Vyhmeister, 2006).

Many studies have been conducted investigating ELT in the Philippines, identifying student language learning styles, examining the difficulties of learning a second language, and so forth (Chae, 2008; Choo, 2007; Vizconde, 2006; Waters, 2006; Waters & Vilches, 2001, 2008). Studies have been done correlating teaching effectiveness with teaching style (Ayaso-Cabusora, 2003; Janet, 2004; King, 2003; Mwangi, 2004). Since teaching style is significantly influenced by teacher characteristics (Heimlich & Norland, 1994), this study focused on the personal and professional qualities of English teachers and how these qualities correlate with teaching effectiveness. In the Philippines, not much research has been done on the combination of personal and professional qualities of teachers, specifically English teachers. It is recognized that poor language skill may not only be attributed to language teachers, but their competence, commitment and influence will go a long way towards the improvement of other fields in the education sector (Bain, 2004). This study aimed to identify the personal and professional practices and qualities that made them *effective* and rise above the countless challenges in the public education system.

In drawing out the profile of what constitutes an *effective* English teacher, this study answered the following questions:

1. What are the demographic profiles of effective English teachers in the study?
2. What are the personal and professional practices of effective English teachers?
3. What are the personal and professional qualities of effective English teachers?
4. Are there differences in the teachers' personal and professional practices when grouped according to age, gender, civil status, religion, educational qualification, years of teaching experience, and level(s) they teach?
5. What effective English teaching models can be developed based on the findings of this study?

Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods design using quantitative and qualitative approaches in identifying, describing, and analysing the personal and professional qualities of purposively sampled effective English teachers. The quantitative part made use of two instruments—Mathematics Enhancement Classroom Observation Record Scale (MECORS) and Questionnaire on English Teacher Personal and Professional Practices (QETP3)—adapted and designed, respectively, to corroborate if the recommended English teachers were truly effective and also to identify their personal and professional practices that led to the extraction of their qualities. These instruments underwent content and expert validation. To substantiate and expand the responses in the QETP3, a semi-structured interview guide was constructed and used in the conduct of in-depth interviews. Basically, it comprised an item base similar to QETP3 but was divergent in nature to elicit further teacher qualities which could not be elicited through a survey questionnaire. There were five major questions under the Personal category and 10 major questions under the Professional category, for a total of

15 questions. The interview guide was carefully formulated to triangulate data from the survey and classroom observation.

This study delimited its population to public secondary schools in the province of Cavite—being one of the top provinces that garnered the highest literacy rate in recent years. The list of the top five high performing public secondary schools (based on students' NAT scores in the last 3 years) was procured from the Records Section of the Division Office of Region IV-A CALABARZON, Division of Cavite. The researcher met up with the principals and English department heads of five schools for the identification of their best English teachers based on routine administrator and student evaluations in consultation with the MECORS comprising items that pertain to effective classroom teaching behaviors.

In the selection of their best English teachers, the school administrators also considered these criteria: Teachers had to be full-time English teachers who had taught for at least three years in the current school and were willing to participate in the study. Overall, there were only 24 recommended teachers out of 68 full-time English teachers from five schools but since two teachers refused to participate, a total of 22 teachers comprised the final sample of the study. The researcher sought the assistance of department heads for a brief informal meeting schedule with the recommended teachers per school. A brief orientation was conducted with each of the five groups of recommended teachers. During the meeting, the researcher secured the teachers' written informed consent, explained the data gathering process, and finalized the teacher-preferred classroom observation schedule within the time frame—two observations conducted in a period of 1 to 2 weeks.

Videotaped and non-videotaped classroom observations were conducted based on the arranged schedules with each teacher. During the period, the researcher decided to include all 22 recommended teachers as the final sample of the study. Most of the recommended teachers were found to be truly effective in varying senses. Concurrent to the ongoing classroom observations for 4 weeks, survey questionnaires were personally distributed to each teacher and later retrieved. Semi-structured and audiotaped interviews with each teacher were arranged based on the schedule preferred by the teachers. All interviews took place simultaneously within the 4-week period of classroom observations and survey administration. The duration of interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 2 hours for each teacher. To maintain anonymity of the participants, code numbers were assigned to every participant, from 1 to 22. The schools were also numerically assigned from 1 to 5.

Analysis of Data

As for the analysis of quantitative data, filled-out MECORS sheets were manually processed to get the average of two observations, whereas the survey questionnaire data were processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS): descriptive statistics was used to identify teachers' demographic profiles, and personal and professional practices; ANOVA was utilized to test if the teachers' practices differed when grouped according to their demographic profile. The quantitative results were indispensable to the extensive extraction and analysis of qualitative (interview) data, for which Qualitative Data Analysis Model of Serdet as cited in Lim (2008) was employed.

Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings of the data obtained from the instruments used in this study. Findings across various data sources were cross-referenced, thereby contributing to the validity of the data. The final sample of this study was carefully selected as *best* teachers by their respective principals and department heads based on routine evaluations and the MECORS scale items provided to them for due consideration of their selection. The list was subjected to the researcher's corroboration by means of classroom observations using the adapted MECORS scale in determining classroom teaching effectiveness. Teachers who garnered a total average of at least 3.0 were considered *effective* as operationally defined in this study. Since all teachers acquired total averages which ranged from 3.3 to 5.0, all 22 of them were considered part of the final sample. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of these teachers.

Table 1
Demographic Profiles of Effective English Teachers (N=22)

Demographic Variables		Frequency	%
Age	20-25	4	18.2
	26-30	2	9.1
	31-35	5	22.7
	36-40	3	13.6
	41-45	3	13.6
	46-50	5	22.7
Gender	Male	1	4.5
	Female	21	95.5
Civil Status	Single	7	31.8
	Married	15	68.2
Religion	Roman Catholic	16	72.7
	Non-Roman Catholic	6	27.3
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	10	45.4
	With MA Credits	12	55.6
Years of Teaching Experience	1-5 years	4	18.2
	6-10 years	6	27.3
	11-15 years	8	36.4
	16 years above	4	18.2

Most respondents were 31-35 and 46-50 years old, each range comprising 22.7% of the total number of respondents. Twenty-one or 95.5% were female and 15 were married. Sixteen were members of the Roman Catholic Church, while only six were non-Catholics. More than half had already taken credits towards a master's degree and 36.4% of teachers had 11-15 years of teaching experience. In summary, based on ANOVA results, neither age nor years of teaching created a significant difference in the teachers' personal and professional practices. Being single or married differentiated teachers' practices in professional growth and advancement ($p = .04$). Married teachers were more likely to engage in practices leading toward professional growth than single teachers ($M = 13.4$ vs. $M = 7.36$). Further, neither age nor years of teaching created a significant difference in the teachers' personal and professional practices. Teachers whose highest educational attainment was a bachelor's

degree were found to be more involved in practices pertaining to family than those teachers with MA units ($M = 13.2$ vs. $M = 6.9$, $p = .04$).

Evident teacher qualities from personal and professional practices

Table 2 presents the teacher qualities that emerged from the data collected for this study on personal and professional practices of effective English teachers. There were a few recurring qualities that emerged in more than one area. The themes on beliefs about teaching, mission statement, routines and hobbies, health habits, family life and spirituality were gleaned from the teachers’ personal practices. Although these were drawn from the themes that emerged from teachers’ personal practices, these qualities were not isolated, but rather interwoven into the professional life of teachers and vice versa.

As with the personal qualities which were extracted from the predominant personal practices, teachers’ professional qualities were also culled from their personal practices. Table 2 shows the evident qualities drawn from the themes that emerged from teachers’ professional practices.

Table 2
Evident Teacher Qualities Extracted from Emerging Themes in Personal Practices

Predominant Personal Practices	Emerging Themes	Evident Teacher Qualities
Teachers view teaching as respecting individual student differences; as a sacrifice and commitment; as a means to touch student lives; as a similitude to personal growth; and as a commitment to stand by one’s beliefs.	Beliefs about Teaching	Committed and responsible; intrinsically-motivated to teach well; firm in their beliefs
Teachers focus on developing students’ English language proficiency; desire to produce successful students; and value the importance of student character development.	Mission Statement	Purpose-driven; concerned for students’ overall welfare; language learning-oriented
Teachers see themselves as good teachers for different reasons; and they identify their unique qualities.	Self-Efficacy	Confident; secure
Teachers pursue their hobbies whenever they have free time; and their personal routines and habits are interwoven into their teaching practices.	Routines and Hobbies	Resourceful; family- and teaching-centered rather than self
Teachers value good nutrition; are deprived of adequate sleep due school and home responsibilities; and hardly have time for exercise due to the multiple responsibilities they juggle.	Health Habits	Good at multi-tasking; creative in using alternative ways towards good health; teaching- and family-focused rather than self
Teachers are dedicated in nurturing their family relationships; and draw strength and inspiration from their family members.	Family Life	Family-oriented; dedicated to family needs; resilient
Most teachers believe they are spiritual but in varying degrees; could hardly find time for Bible and devotional reading and church participation; privately connect with God and pray for others, not generally with others; and recognize the importance of teachers’ spirituality toward effective teaching.	Spiritual Life	Connected with God through personal prayer; willing to grow more spiritually; view teaching as a means of serving God; open-minded and teachable

This study established the similarities of the personal and professional qualities of effective English teachers which were found in this study and the general qualities of effective teachers based on various literature sources. According to Bairagee (2004), a good teacher is a communicator, in touch with God, with humanity, with reality, and has a vision. In the teaching realm, a good teacher is one who organizes his/her teaching materials carefully and thinks about his/her individual student, and is flexible in administration, scheduling and discipline. Further she adds that a good teacher is loving, caring and fair; one who will not give up when adverse situations arise; provides solutions with a positive attitude; a good learner—seeking for truth and committed to learning and growing; a good teacher is a spiritual leader—evidence of spiritual commitment and Christian values is seen in his/her life.

Most of these qualities listed by Bairagee (2004) are similar to the effective teacher qualities presented by Bain (2004), Covey (2003), Eggen and Kauchak (2001), Fox (2005), Freiberg and Driscoll as cited in Rondonuwu (2006), Reyes (2002), Salandanan (2007), Schaffer et al. as cited in Muijs and Reynolds (2001), and Slavin (2003). They outline, in lesser or greater degrees, the components of effective teaching and what teacher-laden qualities are the trademarks of good teachers.

The teacher qualities found in this study are, in one way or another, similar to the general qualities of effective teachers which have long been established in literature. Although the differences are inherent in the personal construct of this study which identified teachers' personal practices, the latter were considered by the respondents as contributory to their teaching success. Since the sample comprised English teachers who envisioned producing students who could communicate much more comfortably than other subject teachers, being language-focused and language-oriented are unique to the context of Filipino teachers of English. Other subject area teachers will less likely encourage students to extensively practise English, as the primary medium of instruction in academia, and will not be more focused on language skills development due to different content focus and learning goals.

Table 3
Evident Teacher Qualities Extracted from Emerging Themes in Professional Practices

Predominant Professional Practices	Emerging Themes	Evident Teacher Qualities
Teachers value subject mastery in preparing to teach English lessons; revise curriculum documents to suit their students' English learning needs; and incorporate SMART objectives in lesson planning and implementation.	Preparation for ELT	Well-informed in their teaching area; structured/logical; Organized and prepared to teach; resourceful; flexible
Teachers set a good example of English language practice; encourage constant English language practice; and allow occasional use of bilingualism for learning purposes.	English Language Proficiency	Articulate; language practice-oriented; persistent; understanding toward student needs; adaptable
Teachers make use of student-centered and language-oriented teaching strategies; and seldom use advanced educational technology in writing.	Teaching Strategies and Technology	Creative and ingenious at using varied teaching strategies; student-centered;
Teachers foster a safe and conducive learning environment for students; and put preventive measures in place to maintain appropriate student classroom behavior.	Classroom Management	Proactive; self-starter; Lively; enthusiastic
Teachers manifest love and compassion in facilitating student discussion; and facilitate class discussions with logical questions suited to students' level and abilities.	Questioning Skills	Fair; emphatic; kind and tactful; sincere; sensitive to students' abilities

Teachers use different assessment techniques to determine student learning; and use other means of knowing if students have learned.	Assessment of Student Learning	Responsible; reflective and concerned for student learning; versatile
Teachers maintain a positive relationship with students as a springboard toward successful teaching; and establish a boundary between their authority as teachers and their joy of being friends with students.	Relationship with Students	Patient; fair and friendly; concerned for students' emotional health; compassionate; trustworthy; respectful; dedicated to helping students; youth-loving; good listener
Teachers respect school colleagues as professionals; work with school colleagues in carrying out school-related activities; and engage in professional sharing with fellow teachers.	Collegiality and Collaboration	Professional; diplomatic; respectful; cooperative; proactive; responsible
Teachers want to grow more professionally given enough resources; and recognize the need to advance in the field of ELT through various ways.	Professional Growth and Advancement	Willing to learn and maximize professional growth
Teachers recognize the school challenges that affect them as teachers; and maintain a positive outlook in facing and coping with challenges.	Coping with Challenges	Resilient; tough; patient; optimistic; resourceful; resolute; inspired; service-oriented

Note: ELT = English Language Teaching; SMART = Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reliable, Time-Bound.

Two models of effective English teachers

This study would not be complete without building models which conceptually summarize the major findings from the effective English teachers' personal and professional practices. Hence these two models of an effective English teacher are anchored on the findings of this study. These models, Personalities Qualities (PERQ) and Professional Qualities (PROQ), are expanded and adequately detailed to create a picture of an effective English teacher in the context of Philippine education.

The PERQ model, as presented in Figure 1, details the point-by-point qualities deduced from the emerging themes in the personal practices of teachers. These were grouped thematically, coming from the themes of beliefs about teaching, mission statement, routines and hobbies, health habits, family life, and spirituality. It could be concluded that English teachers who possess these qualities, as systematically found in this study, are or will be most likely to be effective.

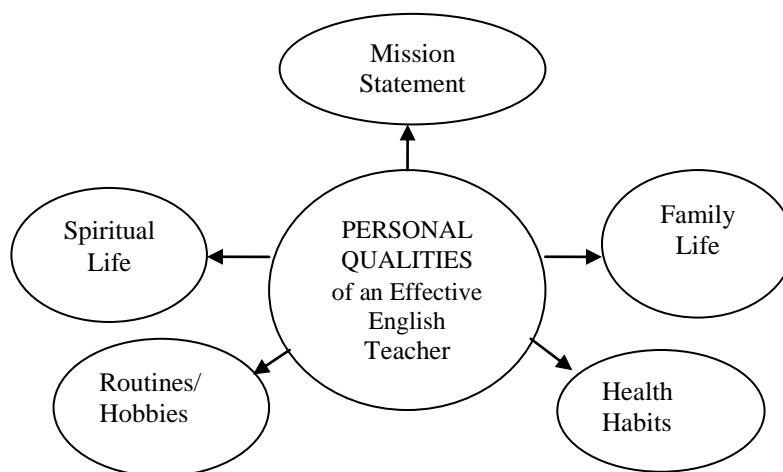


Figure 1: The PERQ model of an effective English teacher

Figure 2 shows the PROQ model of an effective English teacher. As with the PERQ model, the professional qualities in the PROQ model were the qualities extracted from the emerging themes inherent in the professional practices of teachers. These themes from professional

practices include preparation for ELT, English language proficiency, teaching strategies and technology, classroom management, questioning skills, assessment of student learning, relationship with students, collegiality and collaboration, and professional growth and advancement. Notice that most of the qualities pertain to school experiences and actual classroom teaching situations as a teacher's professional life revolves around his/her activities in school. By and large, it could then be concluded that English teachers who possess these qualities in PROQ model are likely to be more effective than those who do not.

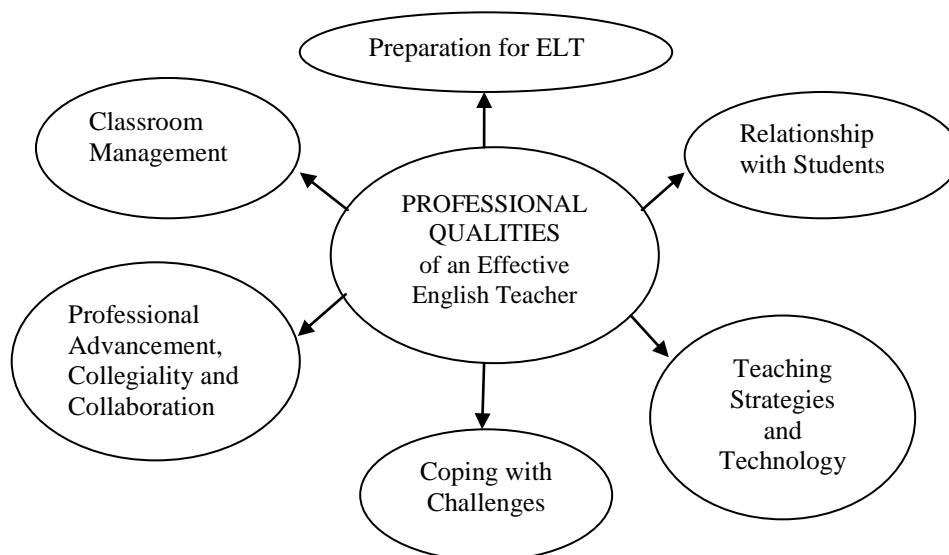


Figure 2: The *PROQ* model of an effective English teacher

Conclusion

The 22 effective English teachers in this study sketched a general profile of what constitutes an effective English teacher in the context of Philippine public schools. Drawn from the two models of effective English teachers, the macro-qualities of an effective English teacher are purpose-driven, language learning-focused, concerned for students' overall welfare, highly family-oriented, connected to God, well-informed in their area of teaching, articulate, organized and prepared, student-centred, committed to teaching, adaptable and teachable, willing to learn, resilient optimistic. It could be construed, therefore, that these qualities enable the teachers to rise above the public school challenges and make a difference through their commitment to excellence in their teaching profession.

English teachers in public schools bear bigger responsibilities than other subject teachers because of the relatively high expectations from stakeholders. The education system cannot be changed overnight, but a committed and effective teacher can make a difference through his/her modest ways which may result in gradual but meaningful changes in student lives and to public education at large. Thus teachers with balanced personal and professional lives will most likely teach more effectively.

With the effective English teachers themselves admitting that their personal lives (establishing and defining a mission and teaching philosophy, daily routines, health habits, family life and spiritual life) directly and significantly affect their teaching performance, this

study further concludes that a teacher could only be truly effective when he/she knows his/her inner core which brings the sense of purpose to come into play; when he/she is in touch with the Higher Power; striving to succeed in personal matters of life, anything that is outside teaching such as hobbies pursued, health habits, family life and spiritual life.

Overall, the findings of this study confirm the “private victory” concept of Covey (2003) which stresses the importance of private victory preceding public victory. Further he asserts that true effectiveness could never be “outside-in” for it is always “inside-out.” This is not surprising, since it makes sense that teachers with balanced personal lives would be more likely to teach effectively. It was also apparent that personal and professional qualities stem from teachers’ practices. This further corroborates that a teacher’s personal and professional life cannot be dichotomized. A teacher is a human being who deals with fellow human beings. It is therefore unavoidable that personal aspects encompass the professional aspects of daily teaching. This study highlighted the importance of the components of a teacher’s personal life in excellent teaching performance.

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