

## TEACHER BELIEFS IN THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD TEACHER : A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

*Most educational programs aimed to produce good teachers because feelings and attitude of teachers can affect the teaching and learning process. What is open to debate are the characteristics to define good teachers. There are many studies by previous researchers that developed lists, models, and taxonomies that identify traits of good teachers in variety of investigation technique. However, there is scarce research on defining good teachers' characteristics using thematic analysis. The aim of this research was to further explore the views of teachers on their beliefs on the characteristics of a good teacher using thematic analysis. Three teachers were interviewed to find out their views on qualities of a good teacher and the data were compared to three related articles. Thematic analysis of the data allowed three themes to be constructed – Knowledgeable, The Teachers' Attitude and The Teachers' Role. The results show that good teachers should be knowledgeable and have certain characteristics. This result can be used as a starting point for a bigger research scale that can contribute to the teacher training program in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** Teacher Beliefs, Qualities, Good Teacher, Thematic Analysis

### Abstrak

*Kebanyakan program latihan pendidikan bertujuan untuk melahirkan guru yang cemerlang memandangkan perasaan dan sikap guru mempengaruhi proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Apa yang menjadi perdebatan adalah bagaimana untuk mendefinisikan guru yang cemerlang. Terdapat beberapa kajian yang telah menghasilkan senarai, model dan taksonomi yang mengenal pasti ciri-ciri guru yang cemerlang dalam pelbagai teknik kajian. Namun begitu, terdapat sedikit kajian yang mengkaji ciri-ciri guru cemerlang melalui kajian analisa tematik. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji dengan lebih mendalam pandangan guru-guru terhadap kepercayaan mereka berkaitan ciri-ciri guru yang cemerlang menggunakan analisa tematik. Tiga orang guru telah ditemu duga untuk mendapatkan gambaran tentang kualiti guru yang cemerlang dan data dibandingkan dengan tiga artikel yang berkaitan. Data dari hasil kajian tematik telah menghasilkan tiga tema iaitu berpengetahuan, sikap guru dan peranan guru. Hasil kajian menunjukkan guru yang cemerlang adalah guru yang berpengetahuan dan memiliki ciri-ciri tertentu. Hasil kajian ini boleh di gunakan untuk kajian berskala besar yang dapat menyumbang kepada program latihan guru di Malaysia.*

**Kata Kunci :** Kepercayaan guru, Kualiti, Guru Cemerlang, Analisa Tematik

### INTRODUCTION

In any educational institution, teachers play a greater role to bring students to a professional level and this effort needs a good teacher. A famous quotation by Charles Kuralt believed that good teachers know how to bring out the best in students. A good teacher developed and helped students to learn at his or her level best. Good teachers also guided and influenced

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students to make sense on the process of learning. A good teacher must have knowledge about learning, human behavior and subject matter taught and also guide students in learning (Ryan and Cooper, 2013).

Belief is a concept that is related to human behavior and learning (Ajzen, 1988). Recognition of these beliefs can help teachers to design syllabus and improve teaching practices. Teachers' belief is a personal knowledge on how teachers should react or solve dilemmas during teaching – learning process. According to Gilakjani (2017), teachers' belief is how teachers shaped their work in making decisions in the classroom and the comprehending of the teaching methods. Zheng (2009) remarked that teachers' beliefs are significant ideas in comprehending teachers' thought processes, teaching methods, and learning to teach. Murphy et. Al. (2004) cited in Mia Bullock (2015) agreed that teacher beliefs are formed based on the teachers' experience as a teacher or students. The teacher will reflect on the beliefs to ensure that it is accepted according to educational principles.

Good teachers have certain personality traits. The earliest research was conducted in 1930s in Germany. 10,000 students were interviewed which then drew the conclusion that good teachers were joyful, friendly, understanding and patient (Ida Z, 2017). Albert T (1985) analyzed primary students' composition with the title "My role model" and listed personality traits of a good teacher were love for children, friendliness, teaching well, wide scale knowledge and good looking. Dewar (2002) analyzed 100 studies and believed that empathy and accessibility were the most consistent traits of a good teacher. Walker J (2010) found 12 characteristics of good teachers from the students written essay namely prepared, positive, high expectations, creative, fair, personal touch, sense of belonging, admit mistakes, sense of humour, respect, forgiving and compassionate. This is supported by Krashen (1987) emphasized on the need of low stress environment using humour to break the ice of the students and create a more friendly and cozy environment.

A number of studies have been done on teachers' belief. Devine, D, Fahie, D and MacGillicuddy, D (2013) investigated on teachers practice and their beliefs using a combination of analysis namely factor, inferential and multiple regression. Another study by Murphy (2004) studied on teachers' belief of good teacher and good teaching among second grade, pre service teachers and in service teachers using a combination of survey, drawing and interview tasks. Some other researchers have investigated various studies on teachers' beliefs but scarce research on the study of teachers' belief on the qualities of good teachers using thematic analysis. Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore the teachers' beliefs on the important qualities a teacher should have to be pointed as a good teacher using thematic analysis.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

This research is to sought the following research question :

1. What are the teacher beliefs on the qualities of a good teacher?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

This is a qualitative research with one-to-one interviews and documents analyzing. Thematic analysis has been carried out to seek the teacher's experiences and understandings. Twenty questions were asked in the interview. Five questions are structured and fifteen questions are semi structured. Semi structured interviews are often best conducted toward the end of study, as they tend to shape responses to the researcher's perceptions of how things are (Jack R & Norman E, 2008).

The second data were collected from the document analysis. Three articles were chosen to support the findings. According to Bowen (2009) a qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence; that is, to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods. The first article (Doc 1) is "Exploring Teacher's Beliefs and The Processes of Change" by Jack C et al (2001). This journal was chosen because it discussed on teachers' belief in the qualities of a good teacher in the eye of language teachers and it was related to the participants as three of them are language teachers. The second article (Doc 2) is "What Makes a Good Teacher? Exploring Students and Teacher Beliefs on Good Teaching" by Bullock M (2008) . This article explored the comparison of student beliefs and teacher beliefs. It was chosen because the findings on teachers' belief were clearly tabled and easy to interpret. The third article (Doc 3) is "What is 'good' teaching? Teacher beliefs and practices about their Teaching" by Dymrna D (2013) . This article was chosen because it is a well-known journal on teachers' belief and it suits the purpose of the research.

### **Data Collection**

First data were collected from interviews with three English female teachers in a meeting room. The first data were collected on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2016 at 10.30 am., second data on the same day but at 4.00 pm, and the last interview were held on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2016 at 4.00 pm. It was a smooth interview where all participants cooperate well throughout the session. The interview was done in English. It took two weeks to transcribe the statements made by the participants. At the first stage, the data were listed according to the participants' view. The researcher read the narratives several times in order to familiarize in searching for themes and subthemes. The emerging themes were developed followed by several coding stages from information gathered in the transcription and documents. Initial codes were grouped into categories by combining similar data and these categories were organized into themes.

### **Participants**

The first participant is Participant X. She has been teaching English language for more than 4 years. The second data is from Participant Y. Participant Y is an experience teacher and has been teaching for more than 8 years. From her experience, she managed to give further clarifications on the points. The third data is from Participant Z. She has been teaching for more than 5 years. The interview with Participant Z was held few days after the first and second interview because of time constraints since she has to attend meeting.

**FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

This research is using thematic framework analysis. After reading and familiarize with the data, the researcher started coding. According to Kuckartz U (2014), coding is like a filing system where it combines data for themes, sub themes and categories. Using coding can help researcher to retrieve the information in the data. It could be words or phrases. Table 1 showed the information gathered from the interview data.

Table 1 Coding from interview data

Puan X	PUAN Y	PUAN Z
Have qualification	Have qualification	Have qualification
Plan	Have experience	Have knowledge
Use Strategies	Read	Planning
As a motivator	Knowledge sharing	Deal with situation
Treat students equally	Lead students to success	Use strategies
Build rapport	Know students level	Know students ability
Admit mistakes	Planning	Sense of humour
Know students problems	Motivation	Tolerate
Teacher with experience	Patient	Practice what we teach
Provide meaningful learning	Use punishment	Strict
Be a mentor to students	Give second chance	Build rapport
Good sense of humour	Create bonding	Classroom environment
Knowledgeable	Religious	
Take care of appearance	Justify	
Body odor	Good rapport with students	
Give justification		
Have passion in teaching		

Table 2 Coding from documents

Doc 1	Doc 2	Doc 3
Build Rapport	Have qualification	Multitasker
Role Model	Have knowledge	Taking on new challenges
Open	Have experience	Confident
Planning	Organized	Passion for teaching
Sense of Humour	Kind and friendly	Use strategies
Adaptability	Helpful and patient	Leads by example
Less Stress	Treat students equally	Good role model
Motivation	Not boring and polite	Gives clear instruction
Lesson suited	Lifelong learner	Flexible
Classroom atmosphere	Patient	Forgive themselves and others
Students centered	Firm	Adapt teaching to students ability
Passion	Have passion	
Upgrade knowledge	Understanding	

Meet learner needs	A good team player	Good team player
Positive relationship with students	Caring	Strives to improve their own teaching
Focus on students needs	High expectations	Values and respect students opinion
		Follow routine
		Energetic and enthusiastic

In Table 2, the data was retrieved from the document analysis. After repeated readings and make connection to one another, charting was done and the thematic analysis of the data set enabled the construction of three overarching themes: Knowledgeable, Attitude and The Teachers’ Role. Table 3 outlined the main themes and subthemes emerging from analysis of the interview transcripts and documents.

Table 3 Themes and sub-themes

Theme 1 Knowledgeable	Subtheme :
	1a) Knowledgeable on subject matter
	1b) Have qualification
	1c) Teacher’s experience
Theme 2 Attitude	Subtheme :
	2a) Good relationship
	2b) Adaptability
	2c) Admit mistakes
	2d) Give second chance
	2e) Sense of Humour
	2f) Appearance
Theme 3 Teachers’ Role	Subtheme :
	3a) Motivator
	3b) Role model

**Knowledgeable**

This theme encapsulated each of the participants agreed that a good teacher must be knowledgeable. This theme is relevant to the new theories that emerged where picture of good teachers correlates with intelligence and subject knowledge (Ida Z, 2017). One of the participants, Participant X emphasized that a good teacher must upgrade their skills through reading so that they are capable in transferring the knowledge to the students.

*“I agree that good teacher should gain more knowledge especially through...reading! Yes...read! (smile) That is the key point. Whatever that we have learnt in our learning years, some of it might not be applied in the current time of our teaching. We must read a lot to know current issues”.*

Without knowledge, a teacher cannot maximize their expertise in teaching. They cannot provide good education to the students whereas education is important for the students. According to Bullock M (2008), a good teacher teaches more than lesson in a book.

*A good teacher “knows that you teach in this career.. What makes a good teacher is someone who is willing to still be a student and constantly “improve upon their own knowledge”.*

The teacher’s belief that good teacher must possess good knowledge not only the general knowledge but also on subject matter. According to Bullock M (2008), a teacher must be able to improve the knowledge on what they taught the students in class and this is supported by Participant X:

*“The teachers should be errr...knowledgeable for what they are teaching.”*

Participant Y also shared the same thoughts with Participant X. According to her :

*“In my opinion, qualification is a must ....because we must have foundation on how to teach especially on the subject matter..at least we know what we are doing.”*

However, according to Participant Y, in order to be knowledgeable in the area, a good teacher must gain knowledge from formal learning institution or in other words, the teachers are qualified to teach. A prevalent sub theme constructed in the data focused on having qualification as to ensure that the teachers are equipped with skills to teach.

*“.. yes..., qualification is crucial because to me err... being a good teacher you need to be one hundred and ten percent ready in teaching..”.*

Another view is from Participant Z on qualification.

*“Owh..Firstly, I believe that a good teacher must have a qualification...yes! qualification... Because you need to have..err.. a formal education before you teach in order to be a good educator and for you to gain good experience and for the students.”*

Although the participants believed knowledge can be gained from formal education, they also agreed that good teachers learn from their own experiences. Bullock (2008) mentioned that a good teacher should have experience, skill and know how to work and this is supported by Participant Z :

*“Good teachers normally are experience teachers....Because with experience, they can give extra points which cannot be found in the book for example with my 10 years of experience as a secretary, I transfer my experiences to my students especially in courses like Business Communication.”*

### **Attitude**

This theme, which featured across participant interviews, was ‘Teachers’ Attitude’ and the most agreeable subtheme is a good teacher has good relationship with the students. All three participants agreed that good teachers should have good rapport with the students. According to Participant X:

*“they will have to approach the students, build relationship, a casual relationship, make friend with them and offer them to come to office, offer extra help”.*

This is supported by Participant Y and Participant Z.

*“I can say..yes...as a teacher, you must have good relationship with your students...errmm treat them as friends...not enemy...” (Participant Y)*

*“The teacher also must build rapport with the students errr...like myself (Participant Z)*

The second subtheme is that good teachers must be able to adapt with the environment especially with the students. Good teachers are those who are able to have good relationship with the students and able to understand the students well as stated by Participant Z :

*“Owhh..being a good teacher, we must know how to deal with situation..for example if my students do not understand what I’m saying, I will lower down the level of language, if it is difficult, I will let other students to explain in the first language....”*

This characteristic confirmed by the findings in the documents. All three documents supported the point. According to Richards C et al (2001), teacher should develop students – teacher relationship by adapting with the situation the students are facing. Bullock M (2006) agrees that good teachers must form strong relationship with teachers, students and parents and Divine et al (2013) regards students/teacher relationship as highly important.

The third subtheme is admitting mistakes. It can be difficult for certain people however, participants agreed that a good teacher should admit mistakes. This subtheme showed that a down to earth personality trait of a teacher can make them a good teacher. Participant Y stated :

*“A good teacher should admit mistakes....(smile)..we are human being and human being makes mistakes”.*

Giving students second chance is the fourth subtheme from the teachers' belief. The participants strongly believed that the teachers are the agent of change of students' achievement. Good teachers are always ready to accept students' mistakes and give them chance to learn from it. Participant Y states :

*“.. a good teacher give chances to the students...we are not here to fail them ..but to make them learn...you see...as compared to my first teaching in UITM and compared to now, there is a huge difference”.*

Participant Z also stated that :

*“they should ask him or her to meet the teacher and ask the reason they cut class err....a good teacher should know whether their problem or the students problem”.*

Another strong subtheme emphasis on the teachers' attitude that makes a good teacher was found in the interview with Participant Y. According to her, a good teacher should have a good sense of humour. The teaching-learning process will not be in stressful context.

*“I think it's important to have a good sense of humour because it help the teacher to be not so jumpy. Teacher who do not have sense of humour, will always get angry at anything that goes wrong”.*

This view is supported by Participant Z :

*“...a good teacher should have sense of humour for example...This is to attract students' attention. We cannot be too serious all the time..especially in language class”*

However, it was quite surprising that none of the selected journals mentioned about this characteristic although many researchers such as Krashen (1987) has mentioned that humour can play important part in helping to relax students and help them overcome stress. Another finding was that the participants believe good teachers should be mindful of the appearance and also obey what is taught in religion. Since the participants are Muslim lecturers, they mentioned for example on being mindful of body odour (cleanliness). Participant X said that:



*“They should be mindful of their appearance not only that.. they should be mindful of their body odour.”*

### **Teacher’s role**

The third theme was the role of teachers in shaping the students future. Good teachers are able to identify where he or she stands in students’ world. Every student is unique and as good teachers, they must be able to switch to different roles in different situations. For example, Participant Y stated that good teachers are motivators at the same time. Teachers are not only doing the teaching but they also motivate the students to achieve their goal.

*“one of the qualities of good teacher....he or she must know ways to motivate his or her students...Students with low self-esteem are normally quite in the class.”*

Students learned from the teachers. The teacher as role model plays a huge part in students’ life. Students will learn to understand the concept of live a whole that would benefit them in the future.

*“We need to practice what we teach them....that’s is what Islam teach us...Especially if we advise students to do something good, we should portray a good example too. Teacher is a role model”*

Participant Y also supports this theme:

*“I think if the teachers are new and they want to be good, they should show good example to the students, do more extra work, they should do a lot of research on their own and think critically on how to help their students because it is very important that we provide meaningful learning to the students.”*

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, being a good teacher is not only people who can teach, but also those who are capable to practice and create enthusiasm in teaching for life. Teachers’ knowledge, roles and personality traits gives a big impact on students’ achievement. Teaching profession is a noble profession as good teachers can inspire hope and shape the students’ future. It is hoped that this research can benefit the teacher training programs in Malaysia as the transformation in education involves raising the quality of teachers in transforming the knowledge into practice that will benefit learners. Without the right input from quality teachers, improvement will be difficult.

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