



Libyan Students' Perception of the Good Teacher: A Study in the English Department at Sirte University

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Keywords:

Perception
Data
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student relationship
encouragement
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teaching quality

ABSTRACT

This study was set to investigate the Libyan students' perception of a good teacher. In doing so, the study adopted a qualitative and quantitative design. The data was collected through an open and close-ended questionnaire. The data was then analysed manually. The findings have revealed that the teacher-student relationship, instructional competence and the teacher's personality were considered to be important in determining the quality of a good teacher by the students under study. The findings also revealed that the students under study tend to view good teachers as those who are patient, confident, knowledgeable about the subject matter, respect the students, cares about the students, treat the students fairly and equally, sensitive to the students' problems and encourage the students. These findings are believed to give teachers an idea on how their students view them which could help teacher to change/develop/improve their own style/way of teaching to suit their students' needs and expectations.

انطباع الطلاب الليبيين عن الأستاذ الجيد: دراسة بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة سرت

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المخلص	الكلمات المفتاحية:
تم إعداد هذه الدراسة لبحث تصور الطلاب الليبيين لمعلم جيد. للقيام بذلك، اعتمدت الدراسة تصميمًا نوعيًا وكميًا. تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان مفتوح ومغلق. ثم تم تحليل البيانات يدويًا. كشفت النتائج أن العلاقة بين المعلم والطالب والكفاءة التعليمية وشخصية المعلم كانت مهمة في تحديد نوعية المعلم الجيد من قبل الطلاب. وكشفت النتائج أيضًا أن الطلاب المجهولين يميلون إلى النظر إلى المعلمين الجيدين باعتبارهم صبورين وواثقين ولديهم دراية بالموضوع، ويحترمون ويهتمون بالطلاب ويعاملون الطلاب بتراحة وعلى قدم المساواة، ويحسون بمشاكل الطلاب وتشجيعهم. يُعتقد أن هذه النتائج تعطي المدرسين فكرة عن كيفية رؤية طلابهم لهم والتي يمكن أن تساعد المعلمين على تغيير / تطوير / تحسين أسلوبهم وطريقة التدريس الخاصة بهم لتناسب احتياجات طلابهم وتوقعاتهم.	انطباع البيانات علاقة الطالب بالمعلم التشجيع التوقعات نوعية التدريس

Introduction

The Libyan education system has gone and is going through some changes/reforms in many aspects such as curriculum and the teachers. Although these reforms are badly needed, they seem to be missing an important factor which is students' perception. As discussed later in section 2.2, many studies highlighted the importance of seeking students' perceptions of their educational environment and its usefulness in modifying and improving the quality of

educational environment. Moreover, Beane (1993) said that the missing link in educational reform efforts at all levels is student perceptions. He concluded that suitable curriculum must begin with relevant, accurate, and up-to-date knowledge of students' perceptions of effective teaching and learning. Moreover, many studies (e.g. Gurney, 2007, McCaffrey et al, 2009) have shown that the teachers' quality has been consistently identified as the most important school-

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based factor in student achievement. Teachers, however, differ. Some of them are classified as good teachers and some others are not classified as such. Moreover, although it might be obvious of what makes a good teacher as such; students tend to differ in their views of what constitutes a good teacher. These differences in students' perspectives of a good teacher may differ due to, among others, cultural, educational and social reasons. However, regardless of why students tend to differ in their perception of a good teacher, understating their views of the teacher is important in developing and improving the learning process. Many studies were conducted in various educational contexts in an attempt to try to explore how students tend to perceive their teachers. However, as far as the researchers are concerned, there has been no research conducted on the Libyan students' perception of teachers. This study is, therefore, meant to find out the Libyan students' perception of a good teacher.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Definitions of Perception

Allport (1966) defined perception as the way individuals' judge or evaluate others with whom they are familiar in everyday life. Eggen and Kauchak (2001) described the cognitive aspect of perception as the process by which people connect meaning to experiences. That is people go to certain stimuli in their sensory memories, and processing continues with perception. Perception is important because it influences the information that enters working memory. Student perceptions are thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about persons, situations, and events (Adediwura & Tayo, 2007; Schunk, & Meece, 1992).

2.2 The Importance of Studying Students' Perception

The need to study the students' perceptions in education was recognized in the works of Bloom (1983), Combs (1982), Sizer 1992, and Marjoribanks & Mboya, 1997. Bloom (1983) claimed that student's motivation to learn new tasks is an affective characteristic. Darling-Hammond (1996) said that the job of a teacher is complex and one thing they cannot afford to be without is the way students think and perceive learning. Perceptions, according to Schunk (1997), can help teachers by showing how their students think of them which can be helpful in teaching. These studies highlight the importance of seeking students' perceptions of their educational environment and its usefulness in modifying and improving the quality of educational environment. Goodlad (1984) and Schneider (1996) in two independent studies noted that students' perceptions about learning are rarely sought, and students rarely make decisions about their own learning. Aregbeyen (2010) investigated and analysed students' perceptions effective teaching and effective lecturer characteristics. The study explored 35 critical teaching effectiveness elements organized into five major sub-headings that included analytical/synthetic approach, organization/clarity of teaching, lecturer-group interactions, lecturer-individual student interaction and dynamism/enthusiasm of the lecturer. In conclusion Aregbeyen wrote "effective teaching requires a lecturer to strike a good balance between his teaching methodology and his personality characteristics" (p.1). Beane (1993) said that the missing link in educational reform efforts at all levels is student perceptions. He concluded that suitable curriculum must begin with relevant, accurate, and up-to-date knowledge of students' perceptions of effective teaching and learning.

2.3 Teacher-Student Relationships and Students' Achievement

Research has shown that when students experience a sense of belonging and supportive relationships with teachers and classmates, they participate actively and appropriately in their learning process (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Moreover, studies looking into the impact teacher-student relationships

on students' achievement have found that this variable has a significant influence on students' achievement. According to Klem and Connell (2004), students need support from their teachers in order learn effectively. Birch & Ladd, 1997 said, "A teacher who is excited about the subject being taught and shows it by facial expression, voice inflection, gesture, and general movement is more likely to hold the attention of students than one who does not exhibit these behaviours" (p. 25). Hallinan (2008) stated that when teachers value and respect their students, students' attachment to education increases. According to Klem and Connell (2004), students' achievement increases when they feel that teachers are caring and that they are participants in a classroom where expectations are appropriate, fair and clearly communicated.

2.4 Review of Previous Studies on Arab and non-Arab Students' Perception of Good Teachers.

In the last three decades there have been many studies which have examined students' perceptions of good/ideal/effective teachers. Telli et al (2008) conducted a study which intended to describe the characteristics of an ideal Turkish teacher according to students' and teachers' perceptions. The results indicated that both students and teachers perceived the ideal teacher as the one who guides, motivates, and encourages students, gives them confidence, has a tendency to build some positive relationships with students and has earned respect from them. Al-Busaidi et al (2016) investigated the characteristics of effective university instructors as perceived by 547 students came from institutions in two different countries, Sultan Qaboos University (Sultanate of Oman) and Süleyman Demirel University (Turkey). The findings suggested that an effective university instructor is the one who respects students as people, recognizes their identity, listens to their concerns and challenges, and is someone students can depend on for support when needed. With regard to teaching characteristics, an effective instructor is the one who treats students equally, builds their confidence, comes prepared for the lesson, and is clear and easy to be understood. Female students placed more value on personality characteristics. In addition, freshmen students were more concerned about optimizing the learning environment by having effective instructors who possess effective personality and teaching characteristics. Another study by Pozo-Muñoz et al (2000) investigated the characteristics for an ideal teacher from the perceptions of students in the University of Almería (Spain). The results suggested that teacher competency was the most important characteristic for an ideal teacher (cited in Chin and Lin: 2009). Conversely, Chen and Lin (2009) examined the perceptions of junior high school students in Tainan to determine the characteristics of an effective English teacher. The findings indicated that students generally perceived both teachers' personality and teacher-student relationship as more important characteristics than those of instructional competence. Being enthusiastic in teaching, friendly, open-minded, respecting students and caring about students were the most important characteristics of effective English teachers. Mahmoud and Thabet (2013) conducted a study on the qualities of the good English teacher as perceived by Saudi and Yemeni college students of English. The study's findings were categorized under four main groups: English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, socio-affective skills and organization and communication. Though there was disagreement among the groups for the priority of the four categories, it was the socio-affective category which was characteristic of all the different samples with preponderance towards the Yemeni samples. Qualities under the socio-affective category are that the good English teacher is patient, relaxed, good tempered, fair, helpful, encouraging, respectful, kind, loving and caring. Moreover, the findings also showed that The Saudi students wanted more translation in class; they wanted teacher to give simple

tests and assignments and they want him/her to give them chance to talk to him/her. Lee's (2010) examined Japanese EFL learners' perceptions of good teachers. The results indicated that the learners perceive EFL teachers to be unique along four central dimensions: the complex nature of the subject matter, the content of teaching, teaching approach, and teacher personality. Another study by (Delaney et al, 2010) revealed that graduate and undergraduate students at Memorial University of Newfoundland identify nine behaviours that are characteristic for effective teaching. These characteristics are: respectful of students, knowledgeable, approachable, engaging, communicative, organized, responsive, professional and humorous.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Question

This study is to set to address the following research question:

- How do Libyan students understudy perceive the good teacher?

3.2 Research Design & Research Method

A mixed design of qualitative and quantitative approaches has been adopted in order to gain deeper insights into the research problem under investigation. As Greene (2007) pointed out that "mixed methods research allows for the opportunity to compensate for inherent method weakness, capitalize on inherent method strengths, and offset inevitable method biases" (as cited in Duma: 2007). As for the research method, a mixed questionnaire (close and open-ended) was

used to collect the data needed as it was seen as the most appropriate method for this study. (For a full version of the questionnaire, see appendix A)

3.3 Participants

Twenty six Libyan university students from the English department at Sirte University were the participants of the study. They were eight males and eighteen females enrolled in various semesters and aged between 18 to 25 years old. The table 1 below presents some information about the study's participants.

Table 1: Some background information on the study's participants

No	Nationality	Gender		Age	English Proficiency
		F	M		
26	Libyans	18	8	19-25	1 st – 8 th Semesters

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Quantitative Results

As shown in the chart 1 below, the results indicate that student-teacher relationship (45%) is seen by students' participants as the most important factor for determining the good teacher. This is followed by the instructional competence and personality which seem to have more or less the same degree of importance for determining a good teacher with 28% and 27% respectively.

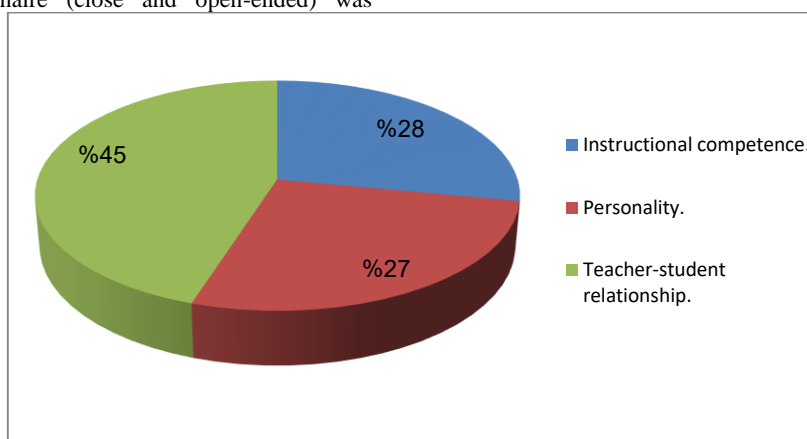


Chart 1: Quantitative results of the three categories.

4.1.1.1 Teacher-student relationship

Teacher-student relationship was rated by the participants as the most important factor (45%) in determining the quality of a good teacher. Moreover, within this category, a further analysis revealed that the items "respect the students", "care

about the students", "listen to and understand students' needs", and "ask questions and encourage students to ask questions" were perceived by the majority of the students as the most important aspects in teacher-student relationship.

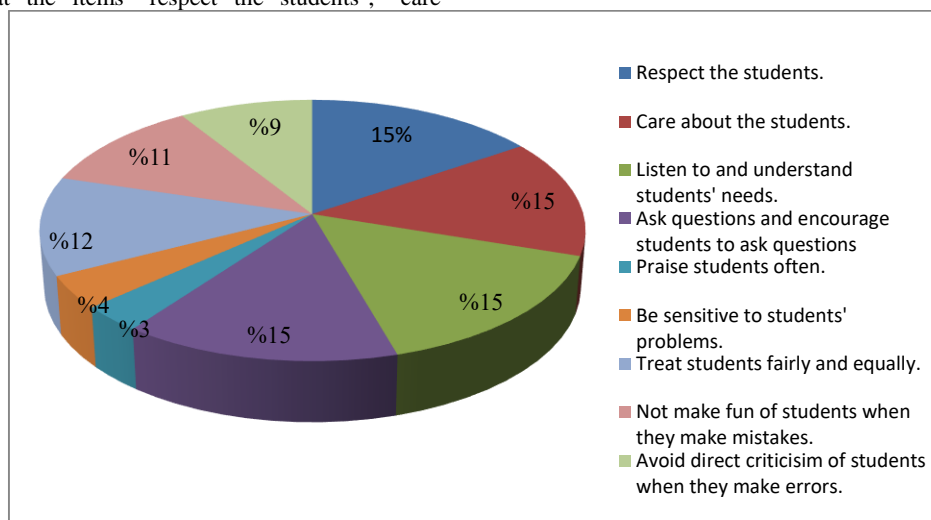
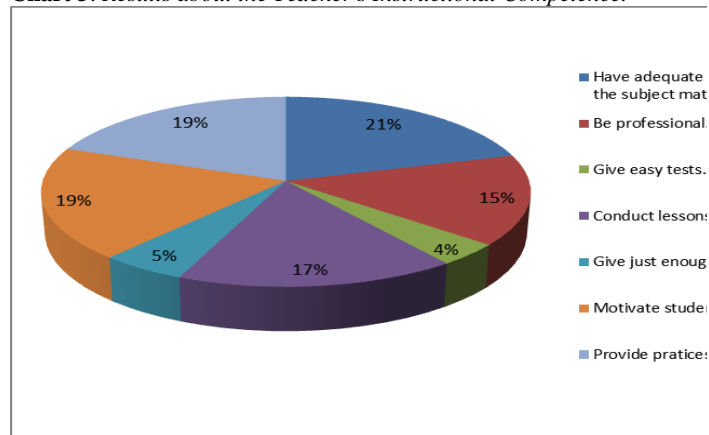


Chart 2: Results about Teacher-student Relationship.

4.1.1.2 Instructional Competence

As stated above, the results indicate that the instructional competence was rated as the second most important factor in determining the good teacher. However, a further analysis revealed that participants seem to give more weight to some aspects within this category. So, for example the item “*Have adequate knowledge about the subject matter*” was seen by 21% of the participants as the most important aspect. This was followed by the item “*Conduct lessons in English*” (17%) and “*Motivate students to study English*”, “*Provide practices and feedbacks*” with 19% respectively, as shown in chart 3 below.

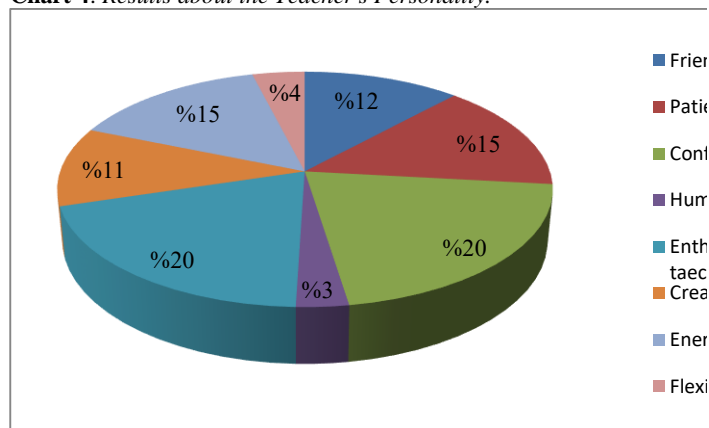
Chart 3: Results about the Teacher's Instructional Competence.



4.1.1.3 Personality

The results have shown that teacher's personality was considered as the least important category by the participants. The results also indicated that being “*confident*” and “*enthusiastic in teaching*” seem to be the most important elements within this category as presented in chart 4 below.

Chart 4: Results about the Teacher's Personality.



4.1.2 Qualitative Results

4.1.2.1 Perception Qualities of the Good Teacher

Responding to the questions of how you perceive a good teacher, most participants believed the good teacher is the one who is friendly, professional, confident, patient, supportive, knowledgeable about the subject matter, respects students, treats them equally, cares about the students and sensitive to students' problems. For example, one of the participants said “I prefer the teacher who has enough knowledge, cares about me and encourages me to work hard”. These perceptions were almost the same for all participants.

4.1.2.2 Teaching Materials Size

Eight participants believed that the teacher who assigns small sheets is a good teacher. For example, one of the students said “I prefer the teacher who assigns small

sheets, because small sheets make me concentrate more and be more excited”. However, some other participants did not seem to agree with this. One participant, for example, said “I consider the teacher who assigns small sheets as a bad one, because small sheets do not give us enough knowledge about the subject matter”. On the other hand, eight of the participants did not care about the size of the sheet but rather they cared about the content of the sheet. Two participants considered the teacher who assigns big sheets as a good teacher.

4.1.2.3 Teacher's Gender

Most participants thought that the teacher's gender is not important in determining the quality of the teacher. They rather believed that experience, personality and attitude is what matters most for them. However, some participants expressed their preference for male teachers as they claim that they are “cleverer and nicer than the female teachers”.

4.1.2.4 Ease and Hardship of Exam Papers

In response to the question of whether or not you perceive the teacher as good or otherwise based on the hardship or easiness or his/her exams papers, most participants did not see it that way. In fact, some participants said that they prefer teachers who set hard exam papers because it demonstrates that the teacher is ‘professional and creative’. The participants did not believe that the exam papers/questions are important in determining the quality of the teacher, as one of the participant puts it “I cannot judge about that, because every teacher has his own way of setting the exam”.

4.1.2.5 Knowledge gained versus passing exams

In response to the question of whether or not you consider good teacher as the one who cares more about students passing exams or the one who cares about knowledge students gain from his/her subject, the majority of the participants, surprisingly, said that they prefer the teacher who cares about how much knowledge students gain from the subject they are teaching as opposed to those who only care about students passing exams. One participant, for instance, said “the teacher who cares about how much knowledge you can gain from the subject s/he is teaching is an excellent teacher”. However, a few participants thought otherwise and they believed that good teachers are those who concentrate on ‘the knowledge which is just sufficient to pass exams’.

4.1.2.6 Traditional versus Modern Method of Teaching Styles

Most participants expressed their preference to teachers who use up-to-date teaching methods rather than the traditional ones. As one participant claims, “I prefer up-to date teaching methodology because it is wrong to use a teaching method from the 17th century to teach students in the 21st century”. Some other participants, however, said that they did not care whether or not teachers were using old or new teaching methods as long as they understand the subject.

4.2 Discussion

The study's findings, presented above, have revealed that the teacher-student relationship, instructional competence and the teacher's personality were considered to be important in determining the quality of a good teacher by the students understudy. However, teacher-student relationship was considered as more important than the instructional competence and teacher's personality. These findings suggest that Libyan students understudy view the good as the one who keeps a good relationship with students. In other words, for them to be a good teacher you need to develop a good relationship with the students. This is seen as more important than the teachers' competence and personality. These are interesting findings because, as was discussed in section 2.3, student-teacher relationship is seen

by many researchers as an important factor in giving students sense of belonging to their institution and it also positively affects students' achievement. That is, the stronger the relationship between students and teachers, the better students will perform in their studies. Comparing these findings with previous studies, the present study's findings are somehow contradictory to the findings by Chen and Lin's (2009) where they have found that teacher's personality and teacher-student relationship received slightly higher scores than the instructional competence of the teacher. In the present study and Chen and Lin's study it was a bit surprising that students considered the teachers competence as less important since as Pozo-Muñoz et al (2000)'s teacher competency has often been seen as the most important characteristic for an ideal teacher by university students. Moreover, the current study's findings have also indicated that "being enthusiastic in teaching", "having adequate knowledge about the subject matter", "motivating students", "providing practices", "respecting students", "caring about students", "listening to students' needs", and "asking questions and encouraging students to ask questions" were perceived by Libyan students as the top important qualities in determining the good teacher. In addition, participants seemed to judge teacher's quality according to his/her teaching methods. Interestingly, the results of this study revealed that neither teacher's gender nor sense of humour were important to the majority of the participants. These findings are consistent with Brosh's (1996) and Chen and Lin's (2009) findings where teacher's gender and sense of humour were perceived among the least important factors for the effective language teacher.

Another finding revealed by the current study was that "Giving easy testes" and "Giving enough homework" were not perceived by the participants as important factors of being a good teacher. These findings were, to a large extent, unexpected and surprising because from our experience in teaching and informal/formal discussions with colleagues, students often tend to like/prefer teachers who are known for their style of having an easier question papers and asks for less assignments and course works. Although we have no clear evidence for these findings, the study's small sample size and the possibility of the participants being not very honest in their answers could be reasons for these surprising findings. Although, our assumption that students liked easier tests and less of course work was merely baseless judgment, it may hold some truth as a study in a similar context revealed contradictory results to our study with this regard. Mahmoud and Thabet's (2013) study in the Saudi context revealed that "Giving easy testes" and "Giving enough homework" were considered to be very important in determining the good teacher by Saudi students as they wanted the teachers to give simple testes and assignments. However, Mahmoud and Thabet's (2013) findings contradicts our study as well as Chen and Lin's 2009 which found that "giving easy tests" was the least important factor in terms of the characteristics of an effect English teacher.

Another findings revealed by the present study was that "being enthusiastic in teaching" and "being confident" was seen as more important, for Libyan students under study, than the teacher's personality. This means that Libyan students tend to confident teachers more than friendly ones. This is may be because of gender differences where the majority of the participants in this study were females (18 females and 8 males). Although the present study did not examine the gender differences on students' perception of the qualities of good teachers, but a research by Chen and Lin's (2009) did. They found significant differences in personality and teacher-students relationship categories, these two categories were perceived by female students as more important in determining the characteristics of effective English teachers than male students, also the top three characteristics for female students were all about teacher's

personality. Thus, a further research is needed to determine how important these gender differences are. In addition to gender difference, different academic achievers may have some influence on students' perception. Chen and Lin's study also showed that students with different academic achievements perceive the characteristic of effective teachers differently. The study also revealed that teacher-student relationship was considered more important for high achievers than low achievers. The present study, however, fell short of examining whether or not the perception of low, middle, and high achievers is different in determining the qualities of a good teacher. Thus, further research is needed in this area.

5. Conclusion

This study is set to investigate the Libyan students' perception of a good teacher. In doing so, the study adopted a qualitative and quantitative design. The data was collected through an open-ended and close-ended questionnaire. The data was then analysed manually. The findings have revealed that the teacher-student relationship, instructional competence and the teacher's personality were considered to be important in determining the quality of a good teacher by the students understudy. The findings also revealed that the students understudy tend to view good teachers as those who are patient, confident, knowledgeable about the subject matter, respect the students, cares about the students, treat the students fairly and equally, sensitive to the students' problems and encourage the students. These findings are believed to give teachers an idea on how their students view them which could help teacher to change/develop/improve their own style of teaching to suit their students' needs and expectations. As Brosh (1996) suggested that effective language teachers' pay attention to teacher-student interactions and teacher-student relationship because teaching and learning is a communication process (cited Chen & Lin 2009, p.245).

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

There is mounting pressure in Libya on teachers to improve their skills and attitude in the classroom and to improve students' achievement. In other words, teachers tend to take the lion share of the blame from parents, educators and policy makers who believe students' underachievement may be directly linked to teachers' quality. As part of the Ministry of Education attempt to improve students' achievement, teacher effectiveness has come under greater scrutiny. An interesting question, then, is how will good teachers in Libya be judged? Will it be on standardised test scores and meeting "graduation" targets, or will students be asked for their perspectives on good teachers? The students' participants' of the current study indicate that students want a teacher who keeps a good relationship with students, the one who cares about them, who treats them fairly. This study indicates that teachers and policy makers in Libya should seriously consider students perception for any reforms/changes in the education system to be effective. Moreover, by examining students' perception of a good teacher, teachers can change/modify/improve their teaching style methodology which would in turn have a positive impact on the students' learning.

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for further Research

Although the present study showed some interesting and unexpected findings and provided a picture for the teachers on how students perceive the good ones, there ought to be some limitations. The followings are some of these limitations which should be taken into account in future investigations about the topic of the current study:

- Small sample size. Larger sample from various locations in Libya should be used in future studies.
- Using a single research method to gather the data. Other

research methods such as Interviews and observations could be used in future investigations.

- The present study did not examine whether or not the perceptions of low, middle, and high achievers is different in determining the qualities of a good teacher. Thus, further research is needed in this area.

- The present study did not examine the gender differences on students' perception of the qualities of good teachers either. Thus, a further research is needed to determine whether or not these differences in gender have an influence on students' perceptions in determining the qualities of a good teacher.

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Appendix

Section (A)

- Which semester are you enrolled in?

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- Age:

- Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

Section (B)

Please read the following statements carefully and select the response that describes your opinion of the good teacher. Be sure to respond to every statement. If you change your mind about a statement, just cross it out and tick another.

Choose one of the following responses for each statement:

1. Not important at all (NIA)
2. Not important (NI)
3. Somehow important (SI)
4. Important (I)
5. Very important (VI)

A. Instructional competence					
The good teacher is someone who should:					
1.	Have adequate knowledge about the subject matter.	NIA	NI	SI	I VI
2.	Be professional.				
3.	Give easy tests.				
4.	Conduct lessons in English.				
5.	Give just enough homework.				
6.	Motivate students to study English.				
7.	Provide practices and feedbacks.				
B. Personality					
The good teacher is someone who should:					
8.	Friendly.				
9.	Patient.				
10.	Confident.				
11.	Humorous.				
12.	Enthusiastic.				
13.	Creative.				
14.	Energetic.				
15.	Flexible.				
C. Teacher-student relationship					
The good teacher is someone who should:					
16.	Respect the students.				
17.	Care about the students.				
18.	Listen to and understand students' needs.				

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19. Ask questions encourage students to ask questions.
 20. Praise students often.
 21. Be sensitive to students' problems.
 22. Treat students fairly and equally.
 23. Not make fun of students when they make mistakes.
 24. Avoid direct criticism of students when they make error.
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30. Do you prefer the teacher who often likes to use up-to-date teaching methodology or the ones who tend to stick with one way of teaching (i.e. the traditional way of teaching).

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25. Could you tell us about your perception of the good teacher?

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Thank you for your participation

26. Would you consider the teacher who assigns small sheets as a good or bad teacher?

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27. Would you prefer a male or female teacher? And would you perceive teachers as good or bad according to their gender?

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28. Would you define teachers as a good or bad according to the ease or the hardship of their exam papers?

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29. Would you prefer teachers who:

- Care more about how much knowledge you can gain from the subject they are teaching.
- Care too much about passing or failing the exam.
- Concentrate on the knowledge that is sufficient for you to pass the exam.

Which of those you classify as a good or bad teacher?