

To cite this article: Võ Thi Hoa Cảnh, Đặng Thị Ngọc Trinh and Trần Thị Mơ (2026). WHAT MAKES A GOOD ENGLISH TEACHER? STUDENTS' INSIGHTS AT VIETNAMESE TERTIARY EDUCATION, International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR) 9 (2): 54-78 Article No. 1206, Sub Id 1862

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD ENGLISH TEACHER? STUDENTS' INSIGHTS AT VIETNAMESE TERTIARY EDUCATION

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2026.9205>

### ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study investigates university students' perceptions of the criteria and requirements for becoming a good English teacher and identifies which criteria students consider most important. Data were collected through a survey administered to 319 university students and complemented by open-ended interviews to gain richer explanations. The results from both sources revealed a broad spectrum of qualities associated with effective English teaching. Students emphasized strong English proficiency and a comprehensive understanding of the language system as foundational competencies, the importance of expertise in implementing the English curriculum, including planning lessons and delivering instruction aligned with course outcomes. In addition, participants valued teachers' ability to integrate technology appropriately to support learning and engagement, and stressed understanding learners' developmental processes, suggesting that effective teachers adjust instruction to students' levels, needs, and progress. Overall, the findings indicate that students prioritize a balance of linguistic competence, pedagogical skill, curricular knowledge, technological awareness, and learner-centered understanding, offering implications for teacher education and professional development.

**KEYWORDS:** good English teacher, qualities, students' perception

### INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English proficiency is increasingly viewed as a gateway to academic and professional opportunities. As a result, the quality of English language teaching (ELT) has become a central concern for educational institutions, especially at the tertiary level in non-native English-speaking countries. Among the various factors that influence effective English learning, teacher competence is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant (Usman et al., 2016; Septiani et al., 2021). Competent teachers not only deliver content effectively but also foster a positive and motivating learning environment that encourages students' active participation and long-term engagement.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), various teacher competency frameworks have been developed to guide teacher training and evaluation. These often encompass four major domains: pedagogical competence, professional competence, personal competence, and social competence (Regulation No. 16/2007, Indonesia). While such frameworks offer a standardized view of what constitutes teacher effectiveness, they are typically designed from institutional or top-down perspectives. Consequently, there is a risk that these frameworks may not fully capture learners' actual needs or expectations within the classroom.

Recent research suggests that students' motivation and achievement in language learning are closely linked to their perceptions of teacher behavior and competence. For instance, Dewi (2024) found that EFL students tend to show higher levels of motivation when they perceive their teachers as professionally competent and supportive in classroom interaction. Similarly, Saggaf et al. (2017) demonstrated a strong correlation between teachers' pedagogic competence and students' learning motivation, underscoring the importance of understanding how teaching quality is perceived by learners themselves.

Despite the critical role of student perceptions in shaping effective teaching practices, relatively few studies have explored what university students themselves consider to be the qualities of a "good" English teacher. This gap is particularly evident in developing countries, where educational reform often focuses on formal standards while overlooking the lived experiences of students. Addressing this gap can provide valuable insights for improving teacher education programs, aligning professional development with learner expectations, and enhancing overall teaching quality in EFL contexts.

To respond to this need, the current study aims to investigate university students' perceptions of good English teachers and identify the teacher competencies they consider most important. By foregrounding the student voice, the research seeks to contribute to a more balanced understanding of teaching effectiveness—one that integrates institutional expectations with learner-centered perspectives.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Teacher competence**

Usman (2011) defines competence as a representation of an individual's qualifications or capabilities, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. This concept can be understood in two main ways: first, as a signal of ability reflected in observable behaviors; and second, as a concept that involves cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, along with the full stages of their application.

International research has pointed to components of teacher professional competence include, for instance, teaching learning strategies, monitoring students' progress (Witcher & Onwuegbuzie, 1999), quality of the curriculum, efficient classroom management, quality of instruction (Kottler et al., 2005), teacher-student relationships (Maulana et al., 2013), and the adaptation of teaching to address students' individual needs (Van de Grift, 2014, Maulana et al., 2017). These papers show many disjointed dimensions of teacher's competence.

In the United States, teacher competency standards are guided by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2002). These standards outline five key areas of teacher competence: (1) teachers demonstrate dedication to their students, (2) they possess a deep understanding of the subjects they teach, (3) they take accountability for their students' learning outcomes, (4) they engage in reflective and systematic thinking about their practice, and (5) they actively participate in professional learning communities.

The Ministry of Education Republic of Indonesia, Regulation No. 16/2007 standardized the academic qualifications and competence of teachers. Accordingly, teacher's competence is classified into four groups: (a) *pedagogic competence*, the ability to manage the learning process of students effectively; (b) *professional competence*, a profound knowledge of the subjects that teacher are teaching; (c) *social competence*, the ability to communicate well with students, fellow teachers, parents and the wider community, and (d) *personal competence*, a suitable personality and behavior as a teacher role.

Accordingly, *pedagogical competence* (PC) is the ability to manage the learning of learners includes an understanding of learners, instructional design and implementation, evaluation of learning outcomes, and the development of learners to actualize their potential. According to Mulyasa (2009), PC encompasses several key aspects, including: (a) a solid understanding of educational principles and foundations, (b) insight into student characteristics, (c) the ability to develop curricula or syllabi, (d) designing effective learning experiences, (e) carrying out interactive and student-centered teaching, (f) making use of educational technology, (g) assessing learning outcomes, and (h) supporting students in realizing their full potential.

Also stated in Permendiknas No. 16 of 2007, *professional competence* (PR) refers to a teacher's ability to master the subject matter, including its structure, concepts, and scientific mindset that supports the content being taught. It also involves a thorough understanding of the competency standards and basic competencies related to the subject. Teachers are expected to develop teaching and learning materials creatively and continuously improve their professionalism through reflective practices. Additionally, they should be able to utilize information and communication technology effectively to support and enhance their professional development.

Social competence (SC) is defined as the effectiveness in social interaction, which emerges from the use of skills to achieve personal goals over time and across different situations (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2019). According to Alma (2009), SC is the ability of teachers to communicate and interact effectively both inside and outside the school environment.

This is further elaborated in the RPP (The design of the learning process), stating a teacher possessing SC should have the competence to:

-  Communicate orally, in writing, and in gestures.

-  Uses functional communication and information technology.
-  Associate effectively with learners, fellow educators, education personnel, and parents/guardians of learners.
-  Associate politely with the surrounding community.

The final component of teacher competence is personal competence (PE). Teachers' PC refer to the ability to realize, understand and regulate their own emotional states, to establish effective interpersonal relationships, and promote the development of socioemotional skills in the educational environment (e.g. self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills) (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). These skills have been proved to greater job satisfaction, a greater sense of excitement for the performance of their teaching work, better management of emotionally demanding situations and a reduction in job burnout since these competencies enable them to adapt to different personal and professional contexts (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017)

Although teacher competence frameworks from different educational systems—such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (USA), Indonesia's Regulation No. 16/2007, and various international models—illustrate diverse perspectives on what constitutes an effective teacher, they collectively highlight several recurring domains: pedagogical knowledge, professional expertise, personal qualities, and social competence. Reviewing these frameworks provides a broader conceptual grounding and demonstrates that teacher competence is a multidimensional construct recognized across contexts. However, because the present study focuses specifically on English language teaching in Vietnam, the English Teacher Competence Framework (ETCF) introduced by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2012) was selected as the primary analytical lens. The ETCF is not only contextually relevant and aligned with national policy but also offers detailed, domain-specific descriptors tailored to English language teachers. Therefore, it provides the most appropriate and coherent basis for measuring student perceptions of teacher competence in the Vietnamese EFL tertiary context.

In Vietnam, The English teacher Competence Framework (ETCF) was officially approved by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in the year of 2012, in which five main domains are delineated for clarity; Domain 1: knowledge of Language, Language Learning, & Curricular Content; Domain 2: Knowledge of Language Teaching; Domain 3: Knowledge of Language Learners; Domain 4: Professional Attitudes and Values in Language teaching; Domain 5: Practice and Context of Language Teaching. This was based on the study of Dudzik (2008). To be more clearly observed, there is a illustration as follows:

**Figure 1: English Teacher Competence Framework (ETCF)**



More specifically, each of the domain is defined by a cluster of detailed criteria, which help educators navigate and measure the level of competence of an English teacher.

**Table 1: The overview of Domains and Competencies (adopted from ETCF, 2012)**

| Domain 1        | Knowledge of Language & Curriculum      |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Competency 1.1a | Teacher's language proficiency          |
| Competency 1.1b | Working knowledge of CEFR               |
| Competency 1.2  | Language as a system                    |
| Competence 1.3  | Understanding how languages are learned |
| Competence 1.4  | Cultures of English-speaking countries  |

Competency 1.5      Academic content in English

Competency 1.6      Language curriculum

**Domain 2              Knowledge of Teaching**

Competency 2.1      Language teaching methodology

Competency 2.2      Lesson planning

Competency 2.3      Conducting a lesson

Competency 2.4      Assessment of language learning

Competency 2.5      Resources

Competency 2.6      Technology

**Domain 3              Knowledge of Language Learners**

Competency 3.1      Understand learners' development to encourage & motivate them

Competency 3.2      Recognize developmental learner language to inform instructions

Competency 3.3      Reflect on learners' values & prior learning

Competency 3.4      Develop learners' creativity & critical thinking

**Domain 4              Professional attitudes & Values in Language Teaching**

- Competency 4.1      Showing professionalism in language teaching
- Competency 4.2      Practicing cooperation, collaboration & teamwork in language teaching
- Competency 4.3      Professional development & life-long learning
- Competency 4.4      Contributing to the language teaching profession

**Domain 5                      Practice & context of Language Teaching**

- Competency 5.1      Connecting learning beyond the language classroom
- Competency 5.2      Reflecting on Language Learning & teaching
- 

Given the multidimensional nature of teacher competence outlined in the theoretical framework, it is essential to understand how these competencies are perceived by those who experience them most directly—students. Their day-to-day interactions with teachers provide practical, experience-based insights that complement formal competency standards. Therefore, examining student perceptions offers a meaningful basis for identifying which competencies truly matter in the classroom. Building on this rationale, the present study addresses the following research questions:

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

***RQ1: What are students' perceptions on what makes a good English teacher?***

***RQ2: What are the most important competencies to make a good English teacher?***

## METHODS

This section presented detailed information about research methods, research instruments, samplings, research sites employed to the current study.

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants [Heading 2] [size 12]*

A purposive sample of 319 English major students from one university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, was selected to participate in this study. They have been taught English as second language, and enrolling in programs that adhere to the same curriculum within the institution. The participants form different backgrounds, bringing diverse backgrounds, policies, to enrich the study's perspectives.

**Table 2.1: Demographic information of participants for the survey**

|                |        | Frequen<br>cy | Percen<br>t | Valid<br>percen<br>t | Minimu<br>m | Maximu<br>m | Mea<br>n | Std.<br>Deviation |
|----------------|--------|---------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| School<br>year | Y2     | 277           | 86.8        | 86.8                 | 2           | 4           | 2.16     | 0.44              |
|                | Y3     | 33            | 10.3        | 10.3                 |             |             |          |                   |
|                | Y4     | 9             | 2.8         | 2.8                  |             |             |          |                   |
| Gender         | Female | 251           | 78.7        | 78.7                 | 1           | 2           | 1.21     | 0.41              |
|                | Male   | 68            | 21.3        | 21.3                 |             |             |          |                   |
| Age            | 18yrs  | 3             | 0.9         | 0.9                  | 1           | 5           | 2.92     | 0.72              |
|                | 19yrs  | 77            | 24.1        | 24.1                 |             |             |          |                   |
|                | 20yrs  | 181           | 56.7        | 56.7                 |             |             |          |                   |
|                | 21yrs  | 48            | 15          | 15                   |             |             |          |                   |
|                | 22yrs  | 7             | 2.2         | 2.2                  |             |             |          |                   |

The study involved of total 319 respondents, mainly drawn from second-year students (Y2), who comprised 86.8% of the sample. Third-year (Y3) and fourth-year (Y4) students represented 10.3% and 2.8% respectively, showing that the large proportion of the participants were in the earlier stages of their university education ( $M=2.16$ ,  $SD=0.44$ ). In relation to gender distribution, the sample was predominantly female (78.7%), while male respondents accounted for only 21.3% ( $M= 1.21$ ,  $SD=0.41$ ). The ranging age of the participants varied from 18 to 22 years old, with the majority of respondents age 20 (56.7%), followed by those aged 19 (24.1%), 21 (15%), 22 (2.2%) and the smallest proportion aged 18 (0.9%) ( $M=2.92$ ,  $SD= 0.72$ ).

Four respondents were selected from the population to proceed to the second phase of the interview for more detailed information. They were politely asked to provide permission through face-to-face meetings held in the classroom after the survey was completed. The demographic information of the respondents is described as follows:

**Table 2.2: Demographic information of participants for the interview**

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| No. of respondents | Coded name | School year | Gender |
|--------------------|------------|-------------|--------|
| 1                  | S1         | Junior      | Male   |
| 2                  | S2         | Junior      | Female |
| 3                  | S3         | Freshman    | Female |
| 4                  | S4         | Sophomore   | Male   |

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**Design of the Study [Heading 2] [size 12]**

The study aimed to uncover students' perspectives on the criteria and requirements that define an effective English teacher, as well as to determine which criteria are deemed most important. A mixed-method approach was chosen to gather comprehensive data and information, selected for its suitability and relevance. A survey was utilized to collect statistical data, focusing on five key areas, and was carefully chosen to gain insights. The questionnaire was distributed to a targeted group of students via Google Docs, chosen for its geographic convenience and efficiency in data collection and analysis. Furthermore, a qualitative open-ended interview was conducted to gather more detailed information about the essential competencies of a good English teacher. This involved interviewing four students, who also participated in the initial survey phase, referred to as S1, S2, S3, and S4.

**Data collection & analysis [Heading 2] [size 12]**

A five Likert-scale questionnaire and an open-ended interview were the main instruments in this study.

The questionnaire was designed based on The English Teacher Competence Framework (ETCF) and the overview of Domain of ETCF (MOET, 2012), consisting of 5 domains of 23 question items. Thus, the employment of this tool was capable to cater the needs and shed lights on the respondents' perceptions. Additionally, the data collection of the questionnaire elucidated the hierarchy of importance of the list of competencies in the framework of being a good English teacher.

The interview included just one question "which criteria do you think the most important to be a good English teacher? Why do you think so? This question aimed to investigate students' comprehensive perspectives on the most important criteria among the list? The question and answers were conducted in Vietnamese as it helps students construct their ideas more fruitfully. Then information was translated into English and coded to find the thematic picture to answer RQ2.

To ensure the consistency of the questionnaire, two pilot were conducted with 30 participants in a university. The reliability of the research instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.929 across 23 items. With this high value of reliability statistic, it indicated a reliable internal consistency, proving that all of the items within the instrument were highly correlated. The consistency supports the stability of the instrument, increasing the overall credibility of data collected in the current study.

**Table 3: Reliability Statistics**

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| .929             | 23         |

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

***RQ1: What are students' perceptions on what makes a good English teacher?***

**Table 4: Items distribution in the questionnaires**

| No | Items           | Relevant domain |
|----|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1  | 1,2,3,4,5,6,7   | 1               |
| 2  | 8,9,10,11,12,13 | 2               |
| 3  | 14,15,16,17     | 3               |
| 4  | 18,19,20,21     | 4               |
| 5  | 22,23           | 5               |

## Domain 1

The table 4 presents a summary of seven questionnaire items designed to access competencies of the domain 1 of being expected of a good English teacher.

**Table 5: Descriptive statistic of Domain 1**

| Items | Statement                                                                                                              | Relevant competency | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----|------|----------|
| Q1    | An English teacher should have working knowledge of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)    | 1.1a                | 1   | 5   | 4.1  | 0.79     |
| Q2    | An English teacher should demonstrate a high level of language proficiency in English                                  | 1.1b                | 1   | 5   | 4.56 | 0.67     |
| Q3    | An English teacher should have a strong understanding of English as a system (grammar, vocabulary, phonology, etc.)    | 1.2                 | 1   | 5   | 4.64 | 0.64     |
| Q4    | An English teacher should understand how languages are learned (language acquisition theories and learner differences) | 1.3                 | 1   | 5   | 4.52 | 0.66     |
| Q5    | An English teacher should be familiar with the cultures of English-speaking countries                                  | 1.4                 | 1   | 5   | 3.58 | 0.86     |
| Q6    | An English teacher should be able to teach academic content effectively in English.                                    | 1.5                 | 1   | 5   | 4.52 | 0.7      |

|    |                                                                                                       |     |   |   |      |      |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|---|---|------|------|
| Q7 | An English teacher should have knowledge of and be able to implement the English language curriculum. | 1.6 | 1 | 5 | 4.56 | 0.68 |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|---|---|------|------|

As illustrated in the table, the number of valid responses was N=319. The mean score (M) ranged from 3.58 to 4.64, showing that there was a high agreement among respondents. The highest mean score was evident in Q3 (M=4.64, SD=0.64), indicating a high level of understanding English as a system was expected from all teachers. Q2 and Q7 were closely followed with M=4.56, relating to language proficiency and English curriculum knowledge, respectively. The subsequent items Q4 and Q6 came in the third place, receiving high score (M=4.52), concerning knowledge of language acquisition and knowledge of academic content in English. The lowest mean score was observed in Q5 (M=3.58, SD=0.86), which was relevant to teachers' knowledge of culture of English-speaking countries, reflecting that this was perhaps the weakest area to evaluate.

**Table 6: Descriptive statistic of Domain 2**

| Item | Statement                                                                            | Relevant competency | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----|------|----------|
| Q8   | An English teacher should have a strong foundation in language teaching methodology. | 2.1                 | 1   | 5   | 4.52 | 0.68     |
| Q9   | An English teacher should be skilled in lesson planning.                             | 2.2                 | 1   | 5   | 4.39 | 0.76     |
| Q10  | An English teacher should be effective in conducting a lesson.                       | 2.3                 | 1   | 5   | 4.56 | 0.71     |
| Q11  | An English teacher should be competent in assessing language learning.               | 2.4                 | 1   | 5   | 4.42 | 0.74     |
| Q12  | An English teacher should know how to use a variety of resources in the classroom.   | 2.5                 | 1   | 5   | 4.25 | 0.83     |
| Q13  | An English teacher should be able to integrate technology effectively into teaching. | 2.6                 | 1   | 5   | 4.24 | 0.82     |

This table illustrated the questionnaire which focuses on Domain 2: Knowledge of Teaching, including six questions (Q8-Q13). Among six items of competencies questioned, Q10 received the highest mean score of 4.56, revealing that it is vital for an English teacher to have strong understanding and capabilities to conduct an effective lesson. Followed by the item Q8, the knowledge of language teaching methodology was strongly perceived as one of the most valuable assets, gaining the mean score of 4.52. Q11 and Q9 also scored well, with M=4.42 and 4.39 respectively, informing the significance of skills of assessing and lesson planning in teaching English. The relatively lower scores were connected to the teachers' ability to apply varied materials (Q12, M=4.24), and employ modern technological support (Q13, M=0.423). This means that these factors were also beneficial to teaching English. Ranging from 0.68 to 0.83, the standard deviation indicated a moderate variability in responses of 319 participants.

**Table 7: Descriptive statistic of Domain 3**

| Item | Statement                                                                                           | Relevant Competency | N   | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|----------|
| Q14  | An English teacher should understand learners' development in order to encourage and motivate them. | 3.1                 | 319 | 1   | 5   | 4.36 | 0.79     |
| Q15  | An English teacher should recognize developmental learner language to inform instruction.           | 3.2                 | 319 | 1   | 5   | 4.51 | 0.7      |
| Q16  | An English teacher should reflect on learners' values and prior learning experiences.               | 3.3                 | 319 | 1   | 5   | 3.99 | 0.85     |
| Q17  | An English teacher should help develop learners' creativity and critical thinking.                  | 3.4                 | 319 | 1   | 5   | 4.24 | 0.81     |

The results informed that participants had strong agreement on these specific competencies in Domain 3 across all four items, with the highest mean score for Q15 (M=4.51, SD= 0.70), which is relevant to competency 3.2. This means that respondents put an emphasis on the key importance of recognition

of developmental learner language as it has strong influence on how to deliver instructions within classroom. Q16 received the lowest mean score ( $M=3.99$ ,  $SD=0.85$ ), suggesting that students may play slightly less emphasis on how teacher evaluates their background knowledge and integrates it into their teaching. Q17 reached at  $M=4.24$ ,  $SD=0.81$ , indicating a positive attitude toward teachers' ability to recognize and encourage learners' creativity and critical thinking in language education. The strong agreement among participants (Q14,  $M=4.36$ ,  $SD=0.79$ ) addressed the salience of teachers' quality to understand learners' development in order to encourage and motivate them in their learning.

**Table 7: Descriptive statistic of Domain 4**

| Item | Statement                                                                                         | Relevant Competency | N   | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|----------|
| Q18  | An English teacher should demonstrate professionalism in language teaching.                       | 4.1                 | 319 | 1   | 5   | 4.19 | 0.83     |
| Q19  | An English teacher should practice cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork in language teaching. | 4.2                 | 319 | 1   | 5   | 4.22 | 0.82     |
| Q20  | An English teacher should engage in professional development and lifelong learning.               | 4.3                 | 318 | 1   | 5   | 4.12 | 0.89     |
| Q21  | An English teacher should actively contribute to the language teaching profession.                | 4.4                 | 319 | 1   | 5   | 4.19 | 0.85     |

This table presents descriptive statistics (Q18-Q21) designed to measure students' perceptions on qualities of a good English teacher within Domain 4: Professional Attitudes and Values in Language teaching. The highest mean score was observed for item Q19 ( $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=0.82$ ), reflecting that the practice of cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork in language teaching is really important for being a good teacher. Similarly, item Q18 and Q21 both yielded a mean of 4.19 ( $SD=0.83$  and  $SD=0.85$ , respectively), demonstrating the noticeable level of value of professionalism involvement in the field. Item 20 which addressed the teachers' engagement in professional development and lifelong learning, received the lowest mean score ( $M=4.12$ ,  $SD=0.89$ ). This score implied that students' perception on this competency was slightly lower, yet still important to engage to it.

**Table 8: Descriptive statistic of Domain 5**

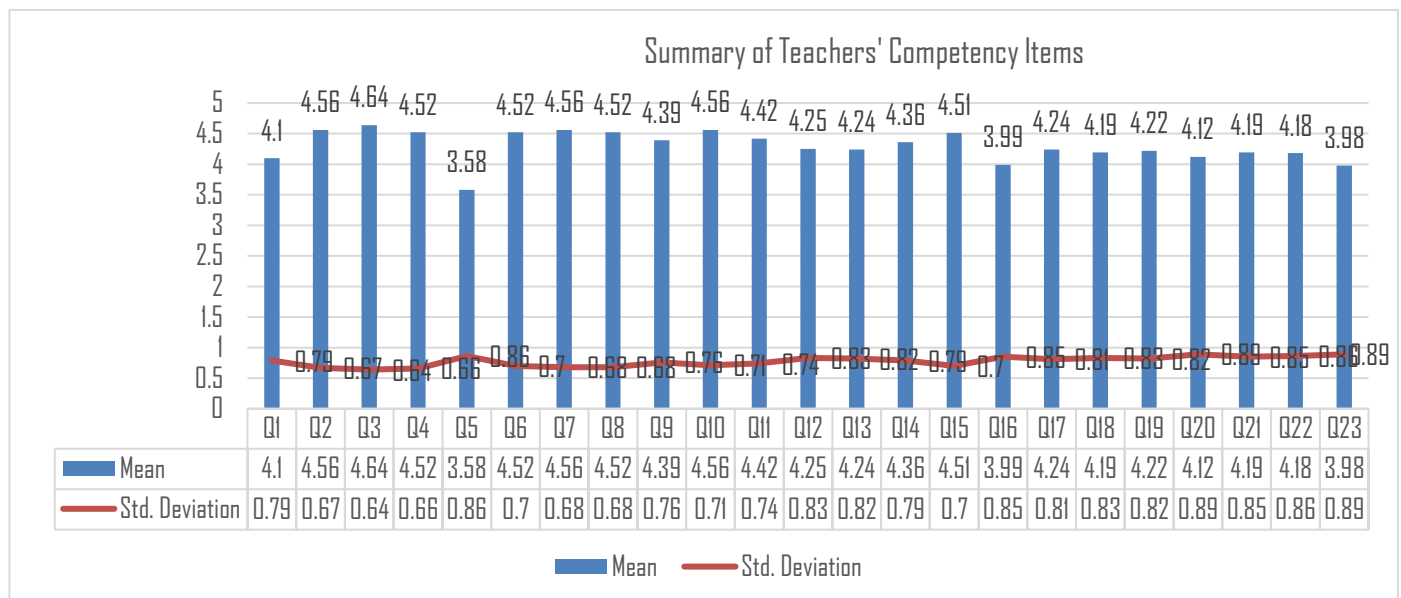
| Item | Statement                                                                      | Relevant Competency | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----|------|----------|
| Q22  | An English teacher should help connect learning beyond the language classroom. | 5.1                 | 1   | 5   | 4.18 | 0.86     |
| Q23  | An English teacher should reflect on language learning and teaching practices. | 5.2                 | 1   | 5   | 3.98 | 0.89     |

As shown in the table, the statistic data collected based on Domain 5- Practice and Context of Language Teaching- underline students' insights of two main competencies (Competency 5.1 and Competency 5.2 which are aligned to connecting learning beyond the language classroom, and reflecting on language learning and teaching practice, respectively). Received the highest mean score ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD=0.86$ ), Q22 suggests the importance of how teacher correlate their teaching with real-world language, offering more angles to their students. Q23 had a slightly lower mean score of 3.98, indicating that the reflection on language learning and teaching practice is relatively important to teachers' professional development. This may point to a need for more professional development opportunities focused on reflective teaching methods to ensure a balanced, context-aware approach to language education.

***RQ2: What are the most important competencies to make a good English teacher?***

To answer the research question 2 of which competencies are proved to be the most important to be a high-qualified English teacher, the mean score of all 23 items was represented and analyzed in details in combination with the data collected in the interview

**Figure 2: The summary of Teacher's Competency Items**



The analysis of the overall summary of teachers' competencies revealed varied areas for teacher development across five core domains. Notably, four items (Q3, Q2, Q7, and Q10) received the highest mean scores, all above 4.5. This indicates that students strongly agree on the importance of key competencies for a good English teacher, including the ability to demonstrate a high level of English language proficiency (Q2), a strong understanding of English as a system (Q3), knowledge of and the ability to implement the English language curriculum (Q7), and the ability to conduct lessons effectively (Q10).

Conversely, three items received the lowest mean scores (Q5, Q16, & Q23), suggesting that students place less emphasis on certain qualities of effective English teachers. These include familiarity with and integration of cultures from English-speaking countries into teaching (Q5), the ability to reflect learners' values and prior learning experiences in teaching practices (Q16), and the capacity to reflect on one's own language learning and teaching practices (Q23).

Collected information from the interview, as observed in the figure 2, students indicated that teachers, who are proficient in English (equivalent to Q2), has a good knowledge of teaching methodology (Q8), are able to integrate technology into teaching (Q13), and understand learners' development (Q14), are the most important criteria to become a good English teacher.

Specifically, students said in term of Q2, students from interview expressed that *"A good teacher must have a strong proficiency in English"* (S1), and S3 also indicated that *"The ability to speak, listen to English, write, and read well in English stands at the first face, without it, a teacher cannot be a good one. If the teacher's pronunciation and grammar are accurate, we can learn correctly and feel*

*confident copying the way they speak”, while S4 thought “a good teacher, I think, have a solid knowledge on content lesson and have ability to be proficient at English and content lessons”.*

In relation to knowledge of teaching methodology, interviewees actively showed their perceptions:

*“A good teacher also needs to know how to conduct a lesson effectively. If not, students cannot understand the lesson and sometimes feel confusion.” (S2)*

*“Teaching methodology is very important. If a teacher is not good at it, I think we have to face up with confusion and misunderstanding.” (S4)*

*“For me, methodology is the most important because being good at English doesn’t mean you can teach. A good teacher knows how to explain clearly, design activities, and help students practice step by step” (S3)*

Besides, regarding technology integration, respondents showed their interest in teachers, who are knowledgeable in this by saying *“technology is very important in learning and teaching. With good knowledge of it, teacher can well design lesson, deliver task in different platform to trigger our engagement and motivation to complete tasks” (S2), or “I feel very excited to learn and finish tasks when teacher use apps or website to design and assign them.” (S1), or “Technology use is very important now because it makes learning more interactive. When teachers use videos, online quizzes, or platforms for feedback, it helps us practice more and learn outside the classroom” (S4).*

In connection with Q14, which is about the ability to understand learner’s development, students revealed *“when teacher knows where I am, she/he can design appropriate lessons and tasks, helping me well understand and be more confident” (S4), or “My teacher gives feedback that matches our level. She doesn’t expect beginners to speak like advanced students” (S3), or “I believe understanding learners is most important because students have different levels and confidence. If the teacher understands our difficulties and emotions, they can choose the right approach so we don’t feel scared to speak” (S1)*



**Figure 3: interview thematic code**

Upon cross-referencing data from both the survey and interviews, the study identified a broad spectrum of criteria essential for being an effective English teacher. Notably, these criteria include proficiency in English, a comprehensive understanding of the language system, expertise in implementing the English curriculum, knowledge of integrating technology into teaching, and an understanding of learners' developmental processes.

## DISCUSSION

Found in the current study, the ability to understand English as a system was regarded one of the most important indicators in having students respond positively toward teacher's quality. They were expected to have good language proficiency and English curriculum knowledge. Another common-sense indicator of a good English teacher is profound language acquisition and knowledge of academic content in English. This is relevant with some previous studies in which they placed a very impressive importance of teachers who possess sufficient level of English proficiency. This can be explained that teachers who has high level of English proficiency are supposed to be vigilant to apply it across different settings and situations (Masduki et al., 2022). In various pedagogical context, it is not rare to face up with unpredictable circumstances in which teachers need to be flexible, knowledgeable enough to solve them effectively. To successfully deal with the rough time, teachers must be controllers who are fully able to understand, synthesize, and put an end to it. Moreover, there is a very close relationship between teacher's proficiency with teaching effectiveness (Syifa Aisyah, 2022). There is no doubt at all that most students will be the final agency benefited from these, helping them enhance their learning

outcome. This is because teachers play various roles in classroom, as a teacher, moderator, controller, facilitator, mentor, delivering information and knowledge to students in a most considerable and appropriate approach to students. As the result, when they are well equipped with knowledge of English system and English proficiency, students will enhance their language capacity. For those, students' insight to teachers' knowledge of language and curriculum are really positive towards.

The second domain disclosed the significant ranking position of having knowledge of teaching methodology. As having this ability, teachers contribute to the development of students' language improvement. In the study of Wang (2021), the linear regression analysis clearly displayed that teacher's language of instruction has a significant contribution to the variance of teaching self-efficacy. in various contexts, the high ratings are connected with teachers who are able to demonstrate concise and clear instructions and explanation, efficient classroom management, and providing righteous feedback on student needs (Dem & Seden, 2025; König & Pflanzl, 2016). Furthermore, having a thorough pedagogical content knowledge has emerged as a key factor of student performance and teaching quality (Jan, Riaz, & Yaseen, 2023; Silvosa & Salimaco, 2025).

Building a comprehensive relationship between teachers and students is crucial for both parties. Students perceived teachers who have good rapport with them as one of the key indicators when rating teacher quality. The quality of the relationship mediates the effect of enhancing students' trust in their teachers' professionalism and their motivation to learn (Fauth et al., 2019; Camus et al., 2024). Besides, students preferred teachers' adaptation of their teaching practices to student needs, constructive feedback, and a learning-supportive environment (Nejad, 2024; Burri, 2023). These findings are aligned with the current study, in which students perceived a teacher who has the ability to benchmark and leverage students' language ability, position them in the correct group, and then provide appropriate language instruction and knowledge. If this is guaranteed, students are able to benefit from efficient teaching methodologies and improved language acquisition.

Students appreciate teachers who are honest, sincere, and passionate about their pedagogical profession. The traits of having a sense of humor and enthusiasm are also highly valued because these factors boost a positive classroom atmosphere and encourage student engagement (Nosidlak, K., 2024; Chang, L., 2020). When teachers have a positive attitude toward their profession, they enhance students' confidence and motivation. Moreover, the recognition of teachers' commitment, responsibility, and professional development is also valued, as these are expected to be good role models for students, essential for them to achieve and follow (Asmawi & Mohammad, 2021; Neupane, N., 2024). This is relevant to the current study, as respondents valued cooperation, teamwork, and passion for lifelong learning and teaching.

A good English teacher is perceived to have knowledge of culturally responsive teaching, in which they respect and integrate cultural diversity into their teaching (Lan, Q., 2024; Maqsood et al., 2024). This integrity helps to promote positive student attitudes, motivation, and academic achievement.

Obviously, individual students have been raised and immersed in different cultures, generating different backgrounds and bringing multicolored variety to learning and teaching. As a good teacher, they should value this and take advantage of it in their teaching, appreciating all the differences. Students really enjoy sharing their core values with others. This is also reflected in the current study, where they expressed their enthusiasm for teaching with real-world connections

## CONCLUSION

This study explored university students' perceptions of what constitutes a good English teacher and identified the teacher competencies they consider most important for effective English teaching. The findings provide strong evidence that students place the highest value on teachers' mastery of English as a linguistic system, high English language proficiency, the ability to implement the English curriculum, and the competence to conduct lessons effectively. These results align with previous research emphasizing the importance of linguistic expertise and instructional clarity in fostering positive learning outcomes (Masduki et al., 2022; Wang, 2021).

While all five domains of the English Teacher Competence Framework (ETCF) were perceived as important, competencies related to cultural knowledge, reflective practice, and the integration of learners' prior experiences gained comparatively lower ratings. Similar findings have been noted in studies suggesting that students often prioritize teachers' immediate instructional competence over broader socio-cultural or reflective dimensions (Chang, 2020).

Overall, the study highlights that students' evaluations of teacher quality center strongly on domain-specific knowledge and the ability to facilitate effective learning. Through voices of students, the research contributes to a more balanced understanding of teacher effectiveness that integrates institutional standards with learners' expectations.

## Pedagogical implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for teacher education, professional development, and curriculum planning respectively. First, the strong emphasis students placed on linguistic proficiency and curriculum mastery suggests that teacher training programs should ensure that pre-service and in-service teachers develop a high level of English competence and a deep understanding of linguistic systems. This aligns with studies which linked teacher proficiency to effective classroom performance and increased student motivation (Aisyah, 2022; Masduki et al., 2022). Second, the high value placed on instructional effectiveness underscores the need for continuous professional development focused on lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment literacy. Research demonstrates that teachers with strong pedagogical content knowledge achieve higher levels of instructional quality and student engagement (König & Pflanzl, 2016; Jan et al., 2023). Third, although competencies such as reflective practice and cultural awareness were rated lower, these areas remain essential for long-term professional growth. Encouraging teachers to engage in reflective teaching and culturally responsive pedagogy can foster more inclusive and adaptive learning environments (Lan, 2024; Neupane, 2024). Thus, institutions should adopt a balanced

approach that strengthens immediate instructional competence while simultaneously cultivating broader professional attitudes and values.

### **Limitations and future researches**

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample consisted primarily of second-year students from universities in Ho Chi Minh City, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or academic levels. A more diverse sample may reveal different perceptions shaped by institutional culture or learning experience. Second, the study relied solely on self-reported perceptions gathered through a questionnaire. While student perceptions are valuable, they may not fully capture the complexity of teacher competence. Prior research has shown that perceptions can be influenced by personal biases, immediate classroom experiences, or individual learning preferences (Nosidlak, 2024).

Third, although the study adopted a mixed-methods design, only quantitative data were reported. The absence of qualitative insights—such as interviews or open-ended responses—limits the depth of understanding regarding how students interpret specific competencies. Finally, cultural and contextual variables unique to Vietnam may influence how students conceptualize a “good teacher,” making cross-national comparisons difficult.

Future studies can build on these findings in several meaningful directions. First, expanding the participant pool to include students from rural areas, diverse majors, or multiple regions in Vietnam would strengthen generalizability. Comparative studies across public and private institutions may also reveal contextual influences on student perceptions. Second, incorporating qualitative methods—such as interviews, focus groups, or classroom observations—would provide richer and more nuanced insights into how students interpret teacher competence. Such mixed-method triangulation has been recommended in prior work on teacher effectiveness (Fauth et al., 2019). Third, future research could explore discrepancies between teacher self-perceptions and student perceptions, offering a more comprehensive understanding of teacher professionalism. Finally, longitudinal studies examining how students’ perceptions evolve as they progress through university may provide valuable insights into how learning experiences shape expectations of teacher competence. This would contribute to a more dynamic and developmental understanding of good teaching in EFL contexts.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This research is funded by University of Finance – Marketing.

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