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# Good Teacher and Teaching through the Lens of Students

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Ali Haider & Shafia Jalal

[alihaider800@gmail.com](mailto:alihaider800@gmail.com) & [shafiajalal@yahoo.com](mailto:shafiajalal@yahoo.com)

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. DES, Faculty of Education Jamia Millia Islamia (A Central University) New Delhi, India

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar TT&NFE, Faculty of Education Jamia Millia Islamia New Delhi, India

## Abstract

*This research paper presents students' view of the good teachers and teaching. The purpose of the study was to uncover the 'qualities' of a good teacher and teaching. The study was conducted on a sample of thirty students of class 11<sup>th</sup>, selected randomly from two schools located in Delhi (India). Students' responses were gathered through an open-ended questionnaire. Findings of the study revealed about nine important traits of a good teacher. Furthermore, quality indicators of good teaching were also identified. Teachers, student-teachers, and others in the stakeholders come under the ambit of this paper.*

**Keywords:** a good teacher, personal qualities, students' view, teaching

## Introduction

For over a century educational philosophers- John Dewy, Kant, Gandhi, and Tagore to

name a few have philosophized on education. They expounded on the art and science of teaching and presented the role and characteristics of a teacher and teaching. In this connection, a prominent Indian philosopher Vivekanand stated: "The true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student, transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through and understand through his mind. Such a teacher can really teach and none else". Similarly, focusing on the way of teaching, John Dewy asserted: 'if we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow' (Dewy). The philosophical foundations of the education play central role and answers many 'What' type questions; viz., what should be the aim of education? What should be the role of a teacher? What should be taught? ...so on. "The role of the teacher is shifted from the traditional role to that of a coach, advisor and facilitator of students' learning" (Blackie, Case & Jawitz, 2010). Educational researchers more or less did play well like educational philosophers in revealing the

qualities of a good teacher and teaching. A plethora of research works is available in this connection (McGreevy, 1990; Kanan and Baker, 2002; Dinham, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Harris & Sass, 2009). Some qualities of a good teacher were: open-mindedness, humor, willingness to share a "personal side," caring for students and spontaneity in the classroom (McGreevy, 1990).

The needs and expectations of students have been continuously changed. Accordingly, pedagogies require changes. There is a radical shift in a pedagogical engagement like student-centered inquiry and problem-solving and which had been widely advocated by educators for the past few decades (Edgerton, 2001). These pedagogies are basically student-centered and train them to acquire knowledge-economy attributes. This, in turn, helps the students to develop the understanding of concepts, increase their skills in communication, critical thinking, and creativity. Moreover, it helps in attaining positive attitudes towards learning and prepares the students to work in teams (Handelsman et al., 2004). In this environment, mutual learning takes place where the where the teacher acknowledges the views and ideas shared by the students in

spite of their expertise. However, Renshaw and Power (2003) argue that in the Asian region, the classroom practices still depicts the old traditions of respect for teachers and transmission of knowledge. Giving respect to a teacher is good but students should not forget their right to ask questions. Usually, students are expected to be diligent and receptive rather than questioning and creative (Renshaw & Power, 2003), and to accept teachers as the main source of knowledge and to be hesitant in questioning the teachers (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). Fortunately, most of the present teachers enjoy their democratic classroom. They save and promote the essence of democracy in their class.

"Every teacher and educationist of experience knows that even the best curriculum and the perfect syllabus remain dead unless quickened into life by the right method of teaching and the right kind of teachers" (Secondary Education Commission). The qualifier 'right' may include teacher's way of teaching, presentation style, expertise in subject knowledge, etc. It may connote personality traits of a teacher viz., punctual, hardworking etc. There is space available for a teacher and researcher to know what

students expect from their teachers. What is their liking and disliking for a teacher? There is need to explore 'right kind of teachers' through the lens of students. The present paper would give insights on the qualities of a good teacher and teaching.

## Method

The sample of the study comprised thirty students (15 girls and 15 boys) of eleventh-grade of age group 15-17 years. The sample was selected on a random basis from two co-ed schools located in west Delhi (India). The research proceeded with the goal to uncover qualities of a good teacher and teaching as perceived by students. Getting true responses particularly from school students about their present teachers were not too easy. This goal was accomplished with the cooperation of two trainee teachers or interns who had a good rapport with the

students and willingly volunteered in the study. A questionnaire was administered to collect responses from the students. The questionnaire contained two open-ended questions both in Hindi and English. While administering the questionnaire, students were instructed not to disclose their identity by writing their name, gender, etc on the response sheet.

## Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Students' responses were analyzed qualitatively. They were asked to write about the teacher to whom they liked most in the school. They were prompted with statement as- 'My good teacher is \_\_\_\_\_ because\_\_\_\_\_'. The students' responses were coded and classified into themes. Analysis of the data and interpretations are presented in the following two sections: (A) Personal qualities of a good teacher and (B) the teaching of a good teacher.

### A. Personal Qualities of a Good Teacher

Individual characteristics of a good teacher as reported by students are depicted below (Table 1).

<b>Table 1: Personal qualities of a good teacher ( N = 30)</b>		
<i>Categories</i>	<i>Points Included</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Motivator	arouse interest, motivate, encourage, share experiences for inspiration	66.67
Listener	listen to students, listen patiently	28.57
Student-centered/Democratic attitude	gives freedom to put opinions/ views,	25.32

	give an opportunity to express views, give chance to chose activities, extending support to students for students' initiative	
Hardworking and talented	hardworking, talented, intelligent, one who gives his/her best	23.81
Friendly nature	humble, polite, friendly, helpful, caring, kind, way of talking, co-operative, understand the feeling of students, giving extra time to weak students	23.81
Good looking	pretty, good-looking, handsome, well dressed	19.05
Unbiased(gender/individual/classroom)	don't take things at heart, treat class with same eyes, treat boys and girls equally, do not differentiate between sections of the same class	11.9
Man/Lady of Principle	firm, strict, punctual, honest towards the profession and like discipline	7.14
Light Hearted Personality	no proud, no attitude, a smile on face, happy attitude, not serious	4.76

In general, nine individual qualities of a good teacher emerged. These are discussed below:

### 1. A good teacher is a motivator

About 67% students mentioned that a teacher was good because he or she motivated them. Some of the responses were as follows:

“Ms./Mr. Anonymous is a good teacher because she or he encourages and motivates us”. “...always speaks lovingly where my mistake was. ... also tells me time to time that I can do well”.

Analyses of the statements reflect that a good teacher points out students' mistakes. A good teacher encourages students; give students appropriate reinforcement. The term 'lovingly' reflects an emotional aspect of a good teacher. A good teacher looks after his/her students and motivates them by using verbal and non-verbal reinforcement. Some students' reported about their good teacher as:

“... always encourages me to do best in my studies and always tell me nice things around the world which motivates me”

“... is my favorite teacher, often narrates us a short story, has some moral”.

"My favourite teacher is a sports teacher. He tells about his experience and tells us our mistake and motivates us to improve.”

“He gives us extra knowledge about our career. He always encourages us.”

“She tells us to read books, novel, etc to improve our studies. She gives us extra knowledge”.

Analyses of the responses display students need motivation apart from acquiring new knowledge of the subject. They would like to be appreciated and inspired by their teachers. In fact, the motivation is an important quality that pervades all aspects of the teaching-learning process; it directs stakeholders towards attaining the particular goals. Motivated students show interest in activities, feel self-confident, and adhere to a particular task. A plethora of text is available on motivation either in the form of

textbooks or in research studies. The finding of the present study is in line with earlier studies. Kramer and Pier's (1997) study emphasized that enthusiasm and being excited about teaching and motivating students as characteristics of effective teachers. Similarly, Yilmaz (2011) in his research found that the students preferred teacher characteristics among the top ten was “enthusiastic, excited about teaching, dynamic, and motivates students to learn” and it has obtained number one preference.

It can be inferred from their responses that a good teacher is a good motivator. The students' reported the teacher is good who narrates few short inspirational stories while teaching; appreciate by saying words like: ‘well done! I know you can do this’, ‘this concept is important for exam’ etc.

However, the students' responses are to be inferred keeping context in mind. The words of praise as they reported for their good teachers would be the effective praise as suggested by Brophy (1981).

## **2. A good teacher is a good listener**

The second most frequent responses were put under heading ‘listener’. About 28.57%

students responses fell in this category. A student stated:

“..... is my favourite teacher because she listens to me patiently”.

"She first listens to and understands the problems of the individual, only then she takes action or decision."

“He listens to me what I want to speak”.

The students’ responses indicate that a good teacher is also a good listener. In fact, a number of research studies are available which focuses on listening skills of students: active listeners, passive listeners, attentive listeners etc. However, research studies that focused on listening skills of a teacher were found to less in number. Listening with patience to students is an art. A good listening skill of a teacher can strengthen students-teacher attachment.

### **3. A good teacher has student-centered or democratic**

Around 25.32% students reported a good teacher should have a democratic attitude; it includes freedom of speech in the classroom, gets an opportunity to express their views, the freedom to choose learning

assignments etc. Some of the verbatims were as follows:

“He offers me to chances to choose my own activities and learning experiences”.

The analysis of student response showed that a good teacher love student-centered environment. S/he actively prompts new ideas in the classroom, encourages group activity and creates an environment conducive to learning. A student stated:

“She always gives me opportunities to express my opinions and views.”

A good teacher is one who creates an inclusive environment and provides opportunities for student’s views, ideas, and opinions. Plasticity in nature and in teaching approaches may nurture creativity and innovation on the part of a student. The teaching strategies such as group work, differentiated tasks, and assessment, communication speed, inviting diverse contributions from students were used for effective inclusion in class.

These findings of the study was consistent with the idea of the skills possessed by a good teacher in the twenty-first century

classroom, institutions must include the ideas of Mayer, Luke and Luke's (2008) views on the characteristics of 'world teacher' and continuously equip themselves and their students modes of intercultural capital, "knowledge and dispositions that have exchange value and power in the intrinsically intercultural exchanges of new social fields of teaching and learning, work and everyday life" (2008, p.97).

#### **4. A good teacher is hardworking and talented**

About 23.81% students used the qualifier good for his/her teacher in terms of hardworking, talented, intelligent, one who gives his/her best etc.

"She is very talented and hardworking".

"He is intelligent and hard-working."

These features characterize that mentors to be talented and knowledgeable. The student's response proves that they liked teacher who was hard working and talented and able to conquer the minds of students with their intelligence. A good teacher

should have at least two kind of talent: a talent to deal the subject knowledge, and talent to deal the students. The subject matter knowledge is directly linked to good teaching and gaining confidence and has a positive effect on student's achievement (Jadama, 2014).

#### **5. A good teacher has friendly nature**

Around 23.81% students mentioned that a teacher is good because of friendly nature. Some of them pointed out as:

"I like my teacher because she behaves politely with us, and she never scolds me".

"Her nature is very good. She never raises a hand to her students".

"...He is good and has kind nature. I like him because he behaves like a teacher and a friend."

"She talks us very friendly."

"He is friendly to us".

Friendly nature of a teacher highlights quality relationship with the students. A relationship where teachers play a role of a guide, counselor, motivator, and also trust plays an important role in their relationship. A good teacher has social and emotional

skills; the skills are used to establish the quality relationship with the students (Jones, Bailey, & Jacob, 2014). The teacher should be approachable to students. A student stated:

"If a student asks any problem in science, she always ready to solve the problem".

A good teacher is one who is easily accessible or approachable to their students. This implies that the teachers need to show eagerness, politeness, and availability for their students. "Good teachers are those who know how little they know. Bad teachers are those who think they know more than they don't know" (Verdi cited in Chud, 2009).

#### **6. A good teacher is good looking**

A teacher is good due to attractive face as well as his/her dress style. Some of the related responses were as follows:

"She is very pretty which keeps the concentration in the class. Her subject is my favorite subject. She teaches computer very nicely. So, she is very nice."

"She looks very beautiful and she is a good teacher."

"He is very smart teacher in my school".

"He put his dresses in a good manner. He puts on formal and jeans both".

"She is very beautiful and intelligent too. ....I also like her dress up. She wears saree and suits both."

About 19% students in the present study reported that the good teacher was good looking and well-dressed. Focusing on the significance of dressing style of a teacher, Phillips & Smith (1992) cited Goebel and Cashen's findings that "the unattractive teachers are perceived to be less friendly, less organized, less likely to encourage interaction between students, and less likely to have high expectations of their students". The clothing one wears influences perceptions of observers (students). The attractiveness influence observers confirmed by research studies conducted (Goebel & Cashen cited by Phillips & Smith, 1992). The students of the present study were 11<sup>th</sup> Graders adolescents; they liked well-dressed and good looking teachers. The findings reveal that the dressing sense of a teacher impresses students' liking.



## 7. A good teacher is unbiased

About 11.9% students reported that a good teacher is not biased. Some of the related responses were as follows:

“She does not make inequality in [among] weak and good students. She always wants to make our class as a perfect class in the whole school”.

“He gives equal importance to every student”.

The responses pointed out that the students disliked favoritism; liked fair treatment in teaching and assessment. The points included in this category were: don't take things at heart, treat class with same eyes, treat boys and girls equally, do not differentiate between sections of same class etc. A fair treatment reduces discrimination and favoritism. Students have love and respect for such teachers. Marais and Meier (2004) reported that the students prefer mentors who are fair to them and does not exploit them with other workloads of theirs. The findings of the present work also revealed that students' liked unprejudiced teacher.

## 8. A good teacher is a man/lady of principles

Around 7.14% students' response was categorized as a good teacher is 'man or lady of principles'. Some of the responses were as follows:

“He is my favorite teacher. He is very kind, punctual,.....”.

“She is discipline loving teacher. She deals students with a very good way.”

“She is strict when anyone is not in school dress up”.

“He is strict while teaching otherwise encourages us how to deal forthcoming challenges in life like taking admission in college etc.”

“She is neither too much strict nor too much friendly”.

“She was my favourite teacher. She never gave me extra marks in any question. She had made my foundation strong”.

“She teaches us Sanskrit. She always examines if students complete their works in their notebook or not.”

The findings of the present study are in queue with earlier findings. Kanan and Baker (2002) and Brookes et. al., (1997)

asserted that students prefer a mentor who is honest, forgiving and fair.

### 9. A good teacher is a light-hearted personality

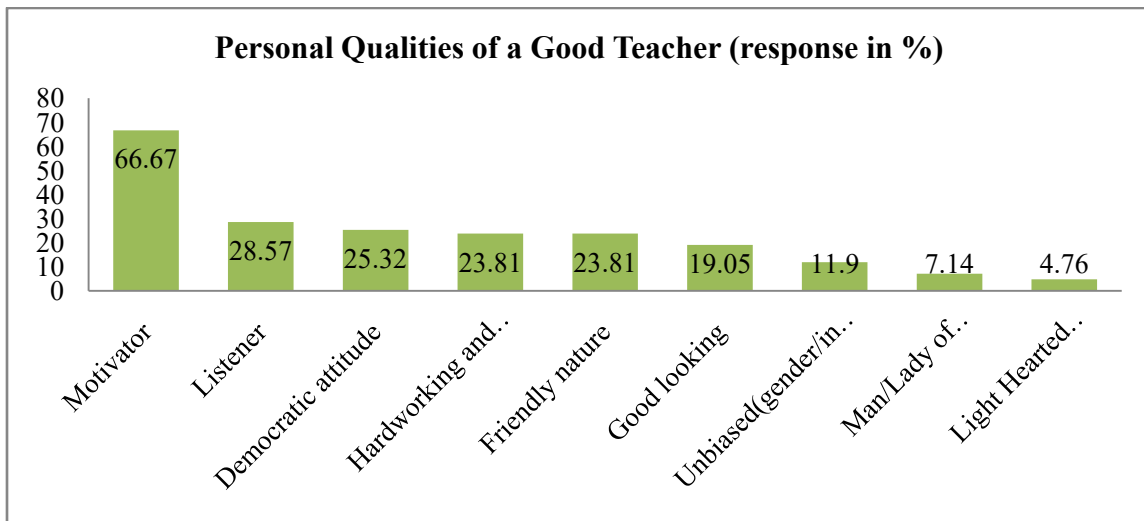
Around 4.76% students wrote that a good teacher possesses a positive attitude towards students. The qualifiers they used for a good teacher were: absence of proud and attitude; a smile on face, happy attitude, not serious face. Some of their responses were as follows:

“I like him because he has no proud”.

“He has no attitude”.

"She has a happy attitude".

The term attitude they used to describe light-hearted personality; one who is happy, intended to be entertaining and not all serious by look while teaching.



## B. The teaching of a Good Teacher

Students' experiences about good teaching are summed up in Table 2.

Categories	Points Included	Percentage
Clear Explanation	Could make students understand, teaching in a simple way, knows children better, explain things in simple words, each topic with clarity, a good conceptual method of teaching	30.95

Fun and Humor	Making fun and joy, use humor, joke telling, laughing, enjoying	19.05
Sound content knowledge	Excellent in content, clear all doubts, command on subject	16.67
Share and discussion	classroom discussion, sharing students experience, telling a related story	7.14
Relate concepts with natural world	Giving a live example, relating topic with real world	7.14

### Clear Explanation

About 31% students reported that good teaching includes a clear explanation. A good teacher knows how “to make students understand”. They know how “to explain things clearly”. A student reported-"He explains everything properly with the simple genuine approach".

### Fun and Humor in Teaching

About 19% students reported that the teaching was good and interesting. It was not monotonous but full of fun and humor. Their teaching was live (active). A good teaching includes “fun and joy”; a good teacher lighter the moment while teaching complex content with the “use of humor”. Some of the responses were as follows:

“His class is too much interesting. I enjoy his class. He makes us laugh”

“I enjoy a lot his teaching and joke. I can’t say how quickly time passes.”

“Sir tries to make us laugh and have fun in the class”

### Sound Content Knowledge

Around 17% of students reported their teachers’ expertise in the knowledge of the subject. The students loved these qualities as a good of teaching. Some of the students’ responses were as follows:

“He teaches every topic with depth and makes the thing interesting. ....I enjoy the class while attending lecture....”.

“She teaches Physics. She is my favourite teacher because she clears my all doubts”.



“.....is my favourite teacher. She teaches well. In a simple word, she describes everything”.

### **Share and Discussion**

About 7% of students perceived that the teachers shared their experiences and also made the classroom more interactive. This allowed the students to share their experiences and relate interact their views and opinions in classroom discussions.

"She studies [teaches] with enjoying [joyful] stories and involve us in plays of many types in the class".

### **Relate Concepts with Natural World**

Around 7% of students reported that the good teacher gave live examples from natural (students') world. Students' responses were as follows:

“While teaching, she gives examples from our surroundings. She uses the concept to relate it to our daily lives”.

“He always relates physics with the real world phenomenon.”

A good teacher relates subject knowledge with students' surroundings while teaching.

Students like live examples; such examples help in anchoring new information meaningful which make teaching live and interesting.

### **Conclusion**

The present research work revealed that a good teacher through the lens of students is a motivator, patient listener, hardworking, friendly by nature, good looking, unbiased, man/lady of principle, light-hearted person and have a student-centered attitude. The analysis of the students' response revealed that content knowledge is essential for quality teaching. A good teacher has command over his/her subject matter. Hudson (2008) emphasized that teachers are required to be competent in their knowledge, skills and professional proficiency in their field. A good teacher is capable to identify and understand the strength and weakness of the students. A good teacher who shares their experience makes the students to see the things in different perspective, which in future helps them to solve their issues. Jadama (2014) in his study discussed that the teacher's conception of subject matter knowledge has a strong influence on the active participation of students. He further argues that it will impact on their learning.

The findings showed that a good teaching involves teacher's mastery of subject knowledge, clear explanation of concepts, fun and humor in teaching, and presenting lived example to relate teaching with students' life. Use of ICT with active learning techniques can make teaching effective (Bhatia & Haider, 2016) while dealing with students of different logical thinking ability present in a classroom (Haider, 2016).

The present study considered students' experiences of a good teacher and teaching. Students' excerpts and the inferences unearthed would give us the insight to understand the good of a teacher and teaching. Certainly, results of the study cannot be generalized because of a number of limitations. The sample is unrepresentative, other factors such as class, age, gender, and experiences etc can affect the results. In future, research can be conducted on a bigger sample with extensive research design.

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