

Master teachers: Who are they?

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Abstract: This paper explores micro and macro-characteristics of master teachers, mainly English language teachers, in different perspectives. The literatures highlight the characteristics of master teachers in countries like United Kingdom (UK), United States (US), China/Hong Kong, Taiwan, Spain, and Malaysia. The literature reveals that micro-characteristics emphasize the effectiveness of teaching and individual uniqueness while macro-characteristics highlight leadership quality. Master teachers have autonomously modified lesson plan, personal-short and long term plans, mental and written plans, and planning thoughts. Additionally, they have mental roadmaps, regularly make sense of and attending classroom event, improvise teaching, solve classroom problems and act as managers, facilitators, demonstrators, and designers in classroom. Moreover, they are the role models in the community, the mentors of the fellow-teachers, the source persons of teacher professional development programs, the greatest motivators for the pupils, the contributors of education policy, and the representatives of the schools for professional and scientific networking. Thus, they are acknowledged and highly respected by colleagues, students, parents, and school principal. They are the benchmark of educational excellence. The paper will come out with lists of characteristics that can be used to identify master teachers.

Keywords: master teachers, micro and macro-characteristics, effective teaching, leadership

Introduction

Teachers play the most important role in English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) classroom. They are the controllers and directors of the teaching process. In addition, they have to assume the role as mediators (Feuerstein in Xiongyong, Samuel, Hua, 2012) and facilitators and monitors (Richards, 2011, 2006). In order to successfully fulfill their roles, language teachers are required to possess a number of qualities. According to Brown (2001), these qualities include technical knowledge, pedagogic skills, interpersonal communication, and personality. Huang (2010) asserts three characteristics of teachers which comprise achievements or professional knowledge, personality, and teaching style while Richards (2011) comes with ten characteristics. They are language proficiency, content knowledge, teaching skills, contextual knowledge, teachers' identity, learner-focused teaching, pedagogic reasoning skills, theorizing from practice, membership of community practice, and professionalism. Tsui (2003) and Borg in Richards (2011) postulate lists of characteristics of teachers they claim indispensable to effectiveness of teaching. They refer to this as characteristics of expert teachers, also well-known as master teachers and excellent teachers. Characteristics of teachers influence students' achievements and teachers with expert characteristics are potential to bring their students promising future (Azliza Haniem, 2011; Li and Walsh, 2011; Mohd Sahandri Gani Hamzah et. al., 2008; Chiang, 2006; Bucci, 2003; Tsui, 2003; Barliner in Brandt, 1986). Thus, this paper explores various views of characteristics of master teachers, especially English language teachers, in micro and macro contexts.

The characteristics of master teachers in different perspectives

Bucci (2003) mentions the criteria of expert teachers. In this paper, expert teachers are called as master teachers. First, master teachers must be able to demonstrate effectiveness of teaching in the classroom. Second, they must be acknowledged by various sectors of the schools including teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Third, they must be able to show their uniqueness as an individual who still incorporates with the curriculum objectives. In this paper, the characteristics of master teachers will be elaborated into two levels—micro and macro. Micro-characteristics refer to Bucci's first and third criteria while macro-characteristics refer to Bucci's second criteria.

Micro-characteristics of master teachers

Extensive studies on micro-characteristics of master teachers have been conducted in the past decade (Azliza Haniem, 2011; Li and Walsh, 2011; Chiang, 2006; Tsui, 2003; Castejon and Martinez, 2001). Much study has been conducted involving teachers in EFL/ELS setting and focusing on effectiveness of teaching. One of pioneers who carried out a study on characteristics of master teachers in the classroom context was Berliner (Brandt, 1986). Berliner in Brandt (1986) stated that the only way to find master teachers is by visiting schools. Then, Berliner visited a number of schools in the US, asked the principals to nominate their best teachers, and observed teaching on multiple occasions. From the observation, he found that the master teachers had some (micro) characteristics such as well organized (having mental roadmaps), rich of knowledge of subject matter, creative, classroom manager, and not necessarily but mostly experienced (10 years or so experiences).

In Taiwan, Chiang (2006) looked at an expert teacher's thinking and contextual factors which shaped his interactive decision-making in EFL reading classroom in a higher education institution. The participant was selected purposively among eight teachers with several criteria such as experienced and knowledgeable. Chiang employed ethnographic approach and qualitative method. The corpus was the result of participant-observation and ethnographic interview. The observations, 32 hours in total, were conducted in one whole semester. Field notes were used during the observation. Meanwhile, the interviews were conducted before and after the observations (pre- and post-observation interviews). All the interview results were recorded and transcribed. It was perusal documents as supplementary data. The findings revealed that the teacher held belief, assumption, and knowledge about EFL ideal classroom which influenced the way he favored classroom strategies. Since English was considered as a challenging subject, he implemented free-pressure learning environment because he believed that learning environment is attracting students' interest in learning. He commonly used brainstorming or webbing to discuss previous lessons. This would empower students to speak and act. The teacher knew his students very well which helped him make sense of the learning, further, formulate his plans and decision and if necessary, make adjustment. In the classroom, he actively asked questions and frequently used performance-oriented learning activities which fostered students' participation. He valued students' responses. In addition, he approached learning through group discussion, exploited students' various cognitive skills, and gave many examples. He used to improvise—deviated from his original plans. In short, this expert teacher shows his distinctive quality in terms of understanding his students and their needs, displaying greater pedagogical knowledge, and having initiative to improvise in unpredictable situations.

In Malaysia, Azliza Haniem (2011) in her research analyzed classroom discourse of master teachers in secondary schools. The research focused on features of classroom discourse and its contributions to successful English language teaching and learning that she called as best practices. Special attention was given to the setting, the process of conducting the lessons, the strategies used by teachers and their interaction with the students. To some extents, it concerned on patterns of questioning, power symmetry, and types of interactions. Additionally, similarities and differences in pedagogical practices among those master teachers were one of main interests of the research. Qualitative method was employed and Hymes' SPEAKING Model was used as the tools in analyzing the data. The data was collected through non-participant observations (adopted from Cresswell's protocols), interviews (orthographically transcribed using Allright and Bailey Standard), and perusals documents. Three master teachers became the participants in the research. Each teacher was observed, video-recorded, and interview three times. So, there were total nine observation notes, video records, and interview scripts. The video-recording and interview results were then transcribed. The results indicated that the master teachers played various roles in the classroom—as managers, facilitators, instructional material designers, and demonstrator of language to the students. The teachers started the class by discussing easier materials. After feeling that the students were able to cope with easy materials, they led to more challenging materials. Scaffoldings were done while the students had to do challenging tasks. Each teacher gave the students to speak and share their voices on the topic decided. It was found that master teachers use almost 98% of English in all classroom sessions as well. The teachers stimulated the students with questions to promote responses and foster communication. Positive feedbacks were also commonly posed in respond to the students' delivered ideas.

In Spain, Castejon and Martinez (2001) examined similarities and dissimilarities of perspectives of characteristics of expert and novice teachers from two groups of experienced and inexperienced primary school teachers in terms of effective teaching. Applying quantitative design, the study involved twelve school teachers from all over Spain who were randomly chosen among the participants of a program called Educational Reform. Six teachers were experienced teachers who had been teaching for more than ten years while six other teachers were inexperienced teachers who just completed their training program. The findings implied that there was a consensus in pointing out that the characteristics of expert teachers by all participants in a series of personal factors such as being sensitive and enthusiastic, having the capacity to integrate in a team or being reflective and critical with one's own practice, as well as aspects related to the specific practice of teaching, such as paying attention to individual differences, encouraging the intellectual and personal development of the students, fostering interaction between the students, being considered a pedagogical leader, and experimenting with new teaching methods.

In China, Li and Walsh (2011) investigated pedagogical beliefs and classroom interactions of secondary school English as a foreign language lessons in non-native speakers (NNS) setting. The focus of the research was comparing novice and master EFL teachers in acting and organizing teaching and learning in classroom. The research was conducted in two secondary schools in Beijing and involved two teachers. One teacher was a novice teacher (Teacher A) and another one was a master teacher (Teacher B). The novice teacher taught a total two classes in a junior high school and 90 students. The students were between 13-14 years old and had intermediate language ability. The master teacher taught Senior 1 students in a high school. His students' age ranged from 15-16 years old with intermediate language ability. The qualitative method was chosen as the approach of the

