

The Missing Component of Teaching: Human Dimension

Dr. Kenan Kapukaya

Director

English Prep School

Zaman University

Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Abstract

Teaching, devoid of the human dimension, cannot provide students with what they expect to get from education. This paper investigates what makes excellent teachers from perspectives of both teachers and students. Three hundred students and seventy-five teachers from three countries-Nigeria, Georgia and Cambodia- have been interviewed and asked to answer a questionnaire to find out their understanding of the concept of “excellent teacher”. The study has revealed that students’ expectations of an excellent teacher are different from what teachers define as an excellent teacher even though there are similarities. This dichotomy causes the bridge of communication between teachers and students to collapse down, which undermines the quality of education.

Literature review

“What makes a good teacher? Is it warmth, humor, and the ability to care about people? Is it planning, hard work, and self-discipline? What about leadership, enthusiasm, a contagious love of learning, and speaking ability?” (Slavin, 2003, p. 3). Kane, Sandretto, and Heath (2004) suggest that “Good teaching is not innate, it can be learned, but some believe that good teachers are born that way”. “Outstanding teachers sometimes seem to have a magic, a charisma that mere mortals could never hope to achieve” (Slavin, 2003, p. 5). Many researchers have described the complexity involved in teaching and learning to teach (Calderhead, 1996; Common, 1989). The complexity is so deep that no widely accepted definition of teaching excellence and excellent teachers exists (McLean, 2001; Trigwell, 2001).

According to Ballantyne, Bain, and Packer (1997), the best teachers have the ability “to create excitement and enthusiasm in the subjects” (p. 434). Creating excitement and enthusiasm seem to have become synonymous with a good command of methodologies and strategies to reach more efficient results. Even though the literature of teaching in education never falls short, the science of education is far from achieving the desired outcomes. So the question is ‘Where is the missing part?’ The answer might be found in the ideas of Kottler, Zehm, and Kottler (2005) that

Much of teacher preparation continues to be focused on methods courses and in areas of content specialty. The assumption behind this training is that when you study a subject in depth and learn the proper methods of instruction, presumably you then become a more competent and outstanding teacher. Not included in this process are a number of other variables that make up the essence of all great educators and infuse them with power-their distinctly human dimensions, including personality traits, attitudes, and relationship skills. (p. 18)

“In the 1960s, writers and researchers began to pay more attention to the human aspects of teaching and learning” (Kottler et al., 2005, p. 8). According to Rogers (1969), the human dimensions of teaching need to be promoted. This is the only way that a teacher is able to act as a “person, not a faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement, or a sterile pipe through which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next” (p.107). Boy and Pine (1971) are among educators (e.g., Armstrong, Henson, & Savage, 2009; Rogers, 1969; Slavin, 2003) who have put the purpose of education across the boundaries of the transfer of information. They make a powerful point that the goal of education is not to teach the subject matter, but to promote the development of productive and positive human beings. Slavin (2003) argues that “effective instruction is not a simple matter of one person with more knowledge transmitting that knowledge to another” (p. 4). If it were the case, there wouldn’t be much trouble English language instructors and learners are facing today. Thus, being “influential and inspirational is not because of training in materials and methods, but rather because of the internal human resources” (Kottler et al., 2005, p. x).

“Effective teachers not only know their subjects, but they can also communicate their knowledge to students” (Slavin, 2003, p. 4). This communication requires a device called ‘bridge of communication’ that connects teachers and students together. The pillars of the bridge of communication are made up of the human dimensions that are appropriate personality traits.

Hildebrand (1973) looked for the ways to “identify and describe effective teaching” (p. 43) and found five components of effective performance, the two of which are: “instructor-group interaction, instructor-individual student interaction” (p. 46). Murphy, Delli, and Edwards (2004) defines characteristics that good teachers must possess and exhibit with more details:

They have control over the classroom, they do not have to yell, and they are fair. In addition, good teachers help students and are kind and respectful. Finally, good teachers take the time to get to know their students and their circumstances, and they treat students with respect. (p. 74)

Reynolds (1995) believes that tasks such as taking into account the characteristics of the learners and human dimension of teaching must be attended to at all levels of education. What makes a good teacher is the ability to carry out all the tasks involved in effective instruction. The best teachers are well organized and good managers, thoughtful in that they prevent classroom and discipline problems before they begin, accessible and easily approachable, warm and empathetic and hold high expectations for themselves and others (Kleiner, 1998).

A nationwide survey done in the United States of America in 1997 and applied to almost one thousand students aged between 13 and 17 revealed that having a good sense of humor, making the class interesting, and having knowledge of the subject matter were the characteristics students listed as the most important for teachers to have (NAESP, 1997). While defining human aspect of teaching, Kottler et al. (2005) emphasize the importance of humor:

Of the personal dimensions of teaching, humor is the most human of all. Teachers who value humor, who not only tolerate laughter and fun in classrooms but even invite them in and encourage them to stay are perceived by students as being more interesting and relevant than those who appear grim and humorless. (p. 18)

Being an effective teacher requires commitment and motivation. This includes having a good attitude and caring about students (Santrock, 2008, p. 12). It is our job, therefore, not only to teach children, but first to interest them in learning. A sense of humor and playfulness are among the most powerful tools available to teachers to help accomplish this mission. It is one of the ways teachers can connect with students (Wolk, 2003). James (1977) in reflecting on the art and science of teaching excellence suggested that both art and science are involved in tapping students’ interest:

In teaching, you must simply work your pupil into such a state of interest in what you are going to teach him that every other object of attention is banished from his mind; then reveal it to him so impressively that he will remember the occasion to his dying day; and finally fill him with devouring curiosity to know what the next steps in the subject are. (p. 24)

Obviously it is not an easy task for a teacher to create such an extraordinary teaching environment. But it is clear that instructors who couldn’t build up a bridge of communication with students by using appropriate personality traits, human dimensions, will never be able to be remembered as a great teacher. “Legendary” teachers of Scheidecker and Freeman (1999), “exemplary teachers” of Hativa, Barak, and Simhi (2001) and “good teachers of Murphy, Delli, and Edwards (2004) have excellent professional competence but they cannot be called “legendary”, “exemplary” or “good” without incorporating human dimensions into their teaching activities. In their review of research on the characteristics of excellent teachers, Hativa et al. (2001) found that “exemplary teachers have positive rapport with students, show high expectations of them, encourage them and generally maintain a positive classroom environment. (p. 703)

It is the human dimension that gives all teachers, whether in the classroom, the sports arena, or the home, their power as effective influencers. If you review the list of qualities that made your best teachers effective, you probably noticed that so much of what made a difference in your life was not what they did, but who they were as human beings. They exhibited certain characteristics that helped you to trust them, to believe in them (Kottler et al., 2005, p. 3).

To sum up, the profile of a good teacher goes beyond the knowledge or even the ways it is transmitted. The healthier the bridge of communication is between an instructor and students, the more efficient and productive the education processes are. Therefore, instructors need to use human dimension of education.

Study

The main purpose of the study is to find out the most important types of good personality traits, human dimensions, through a questionnaire application. All the features given in the questionnaire are important, but according to the country and the cultural background of the learners, the level of importance of the features may change. The questionnaire shown below was applied in three countries: Nigeria, Georgia, and Cambodia. The features were determined after a number of discussions with colleagues, English language instructors at Zaman University. The questionnaire is in Figure 1 below.

Please choose the best three features that makes a teacher an excellent teacher and put them in order of importance.	
A.	friendliness towards students
B.	using up-to-date modern methods
C.	discipline
D.	using technology in class
E.	competence in the relevant subject
F.	tolerance/flexibility
G.	patience
Write only the letter that represents the feature next to the number below.	
1 st	feature
2 nd	feature
3 rd	feature

Figure 1. Student Questionnaire

Subjects

Three hundred students in total were selected randomly from among male and female students at 16-18 years of age (100 students in each country). The students were given enough time to read through the questionnaire, understand the content of the questionnaire, and choose the most important features. The subjects in Nigeria are from Nigerian-Turkish International Colleges in Nigeria, The English Prep School of International Black Sea University in Georgia, and from The English Prep School of Zaman University in Cambodia. The countries have been selected with the intention that each country would represent the cultural and historical background of the other countries in the same region. Therefore, Nigeria represents African students’ tendencies. Georgia represents Middle Eastern cultural background and Cambodia represents Far Eastern or South East Asian cultural setting. Thus we would be able to discover if there are any differences of opinion on features excellent teachers have in different countries.

In Table 1 below are the three most important features that Nigerian students prefer their teachers have.

Table 1: Nigerian Students’ Preferences

	1 st Feature	2 nd Feature	3 rd Feature	Total Score	Percentage
friendliness	41	16	11	166	55.33%
modern methods	12	24	10	94	31.33%
discipline	12	17	14	84	28.00%
technology	17	18	8	95	31.67%
competence	4	10	15	47	15.67%
tolerance	6	2	16	38	12.67%
patience	8	13	26	76	25.33%

The numbers under the first, second and third features show how many students have selected the relevant feature in the same row (e.g., in the first row, 41 students selected friendliness as their first feature, 16 students as their second feature, and 11 students as their third feature.).

In order to incorporate the weights of features, 3 points are allocated to the first feature, 2 points to the second feature, and 1 point to the third feature. Thus 166 is the total score for friendliness: $(41 \times 3) + (16 \times 2) + (11 \times 1) = 166$. If all the subjects had selected friendliness, the maximum score would be 300. The total score divided by the maximum score determines the percentage of each of the features in Table 1.

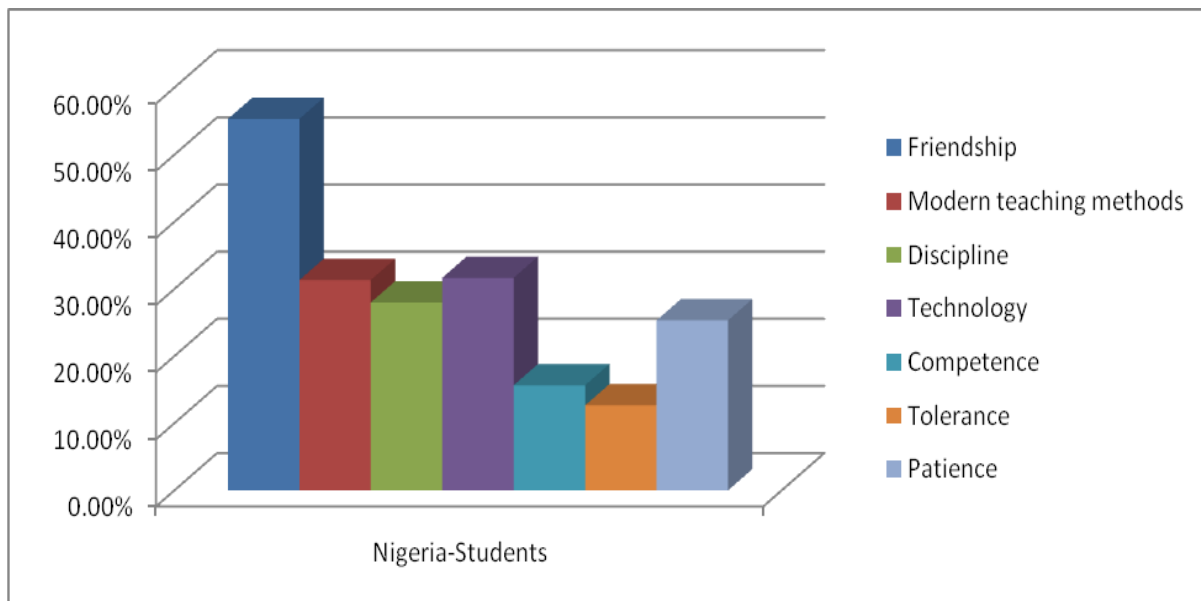


Figure 2. Nigerian Students' Preferences

According to Figure 2, the students in Nigeria want to have teachers who are friendly (55%), know how to use and utilize modern teaching methods (31%), and technology (32%) and are authoritative (28%). Nigerian students also want to have teachers who shows patience with 25% in the process of teaching and learning. The interpretation of the high demand of modern teaching methods and technology is that Nigerian educational system is in the process of development. Even in big cities schools do not have basic facilities such as power, lighting systems, blackboards to write on, learning materials, or any kind of technological devices such as projectors, computers, smart boards, air conditioners, etc. The students who study under such conditions want to underline their desire that excellent teachers must have the features stated above. It is interesting to see that the students put the competence almost in the last place. In Nigerian context, an extremely limited number of students have the opportunity to further their education because of the poor educational setting and financial requirements. The vast majority of Nigerians do not have any future educational expectations.

Table 2 : Nigerian Teachers' Preferences

	1 st Feature	2 nd Feature	3 rd Feature	Total Score	Percentage
friendliness	9	1	4	33	44.00%
modern methods	1	2	0	7	9.33%
discipline	11	8	2	51	68.00%
technology	0	7	2	16	21.33%
competence	2	1	4	12	16.00%
tolerance	1	3	6	15	20.00%
patience	1	3	7	16	21.33%

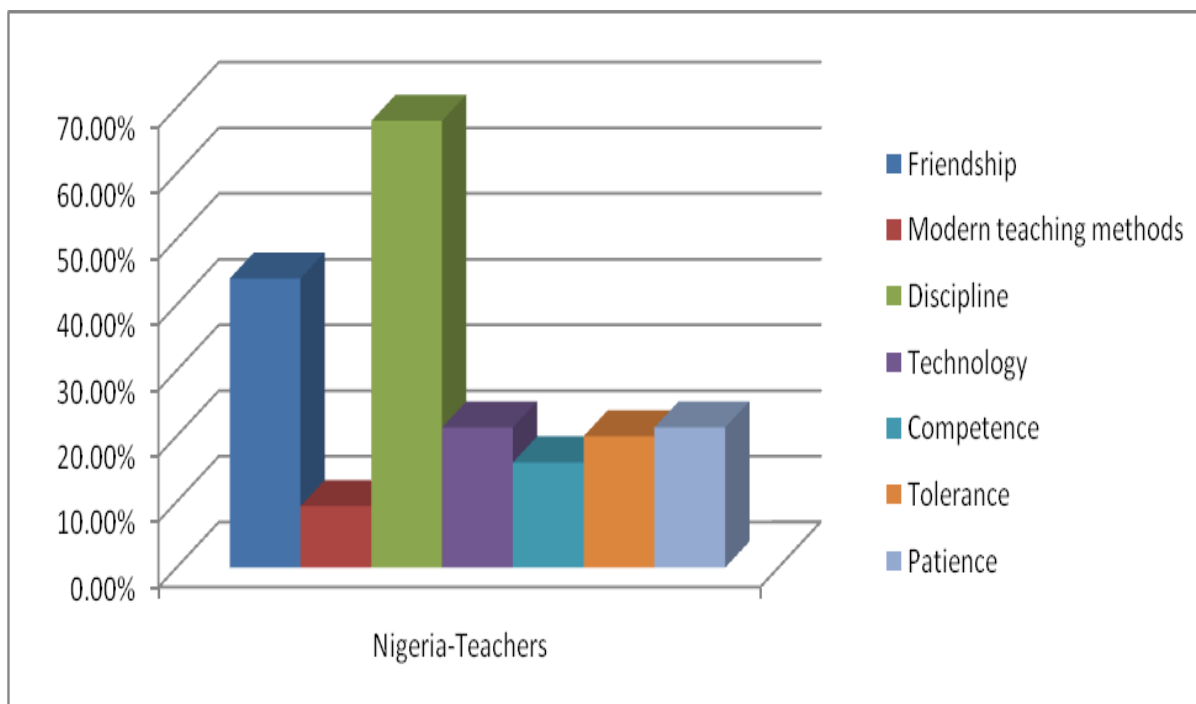


Figure 3. Nigerian Teachers' Preferences

Twenty-five teachers from Nigeria were asked to answer the questionnaire given in Table 2. As opposed to the Nigerian students' preferences, the first feature Nigerian teachers believe that excellent teacher must possess is discipline (68%). Friendship comes after discipline (44%). It is very significant that both students and teachers put competence in the last place (16% for both teachers and students). This might be because of the fact that the poor educational quality in Nigerian schools does not engender high expectations of competence from both students and teachers. When Table 1 and Table 2 are compared, the most significant difference is the use of modern teaching methods. Nigerian students put methods in the second place (31%) whereas Nigerian teachers put methods in the last place (9%). From the feedback from the Nigerian teachers in Figure 3, excellent teachers put discipline in the first place, which means they are mainly authoritative, but at the same, they value having good relationships with their students as well. The data taken from both Table 1 and 2 is a very good indication of the differences in opinion of what constitutes an excellent teacher. Since the understanding of what an excellent teacher is is different, it is difficult to create a productive teaching and learning environment between teachers and students.

Table 3 : Georgian Students' Preferences

	1 st Feature	2 nd Feature	3 rd Feature	Total Score	Percentage
friendliness	55	17	14	213	71.00%
modern methods	7	18	18	75	25.00%
discipline	2	23	11	63	21.00%
technology	3	8	9	34	11.33%
competence	19	17	21	112	37.33%
tolerance	8	11	20	66	22.00%
patience	6	6	7	37	12.33%

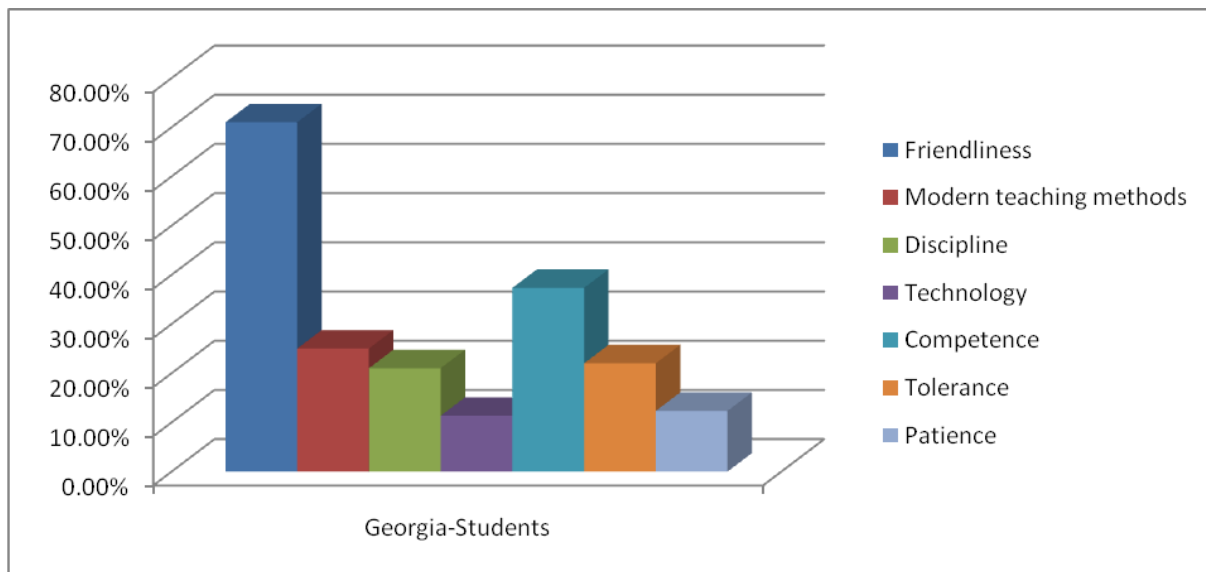


Figure 4. Georgian Students' Preferences

Georgia is a former Soviet Union state. According to Figure 4, Georgian students define excellent teachers as friendly (71%), the highest percentage, competent (37%), and aware of modern teaching methods (25%). Georgian students put friendliness in the first place, ahead of competence. Georgian people are generally defined as quick-tempered people which might be the interpretation of the low percentage of patience. Discipline is not emphasized and the use of technology is the lowest one. It is understood from the figures above that Georgian students regard excellent teachers as those who are friendly and know their subjects well. They do not see excellent teachers authoritative or good at using technology in the process of teaching.

Table 4: Georgian Teachers' Preferences

	1 st Feature	2 nd Feature	3 rd Feature	Total Score	Percentage
friendliness	5	4	8	31	41.33%
modern methods	2	11	4	32	42.67%
discipline	1	4	7	18	24.00%
technology	2	2	3	13	17.33%
competence	10	0	1	31	41.33%
tolerance	4	1	1	15	20.00%
patience	1	3	1	10	13.33%

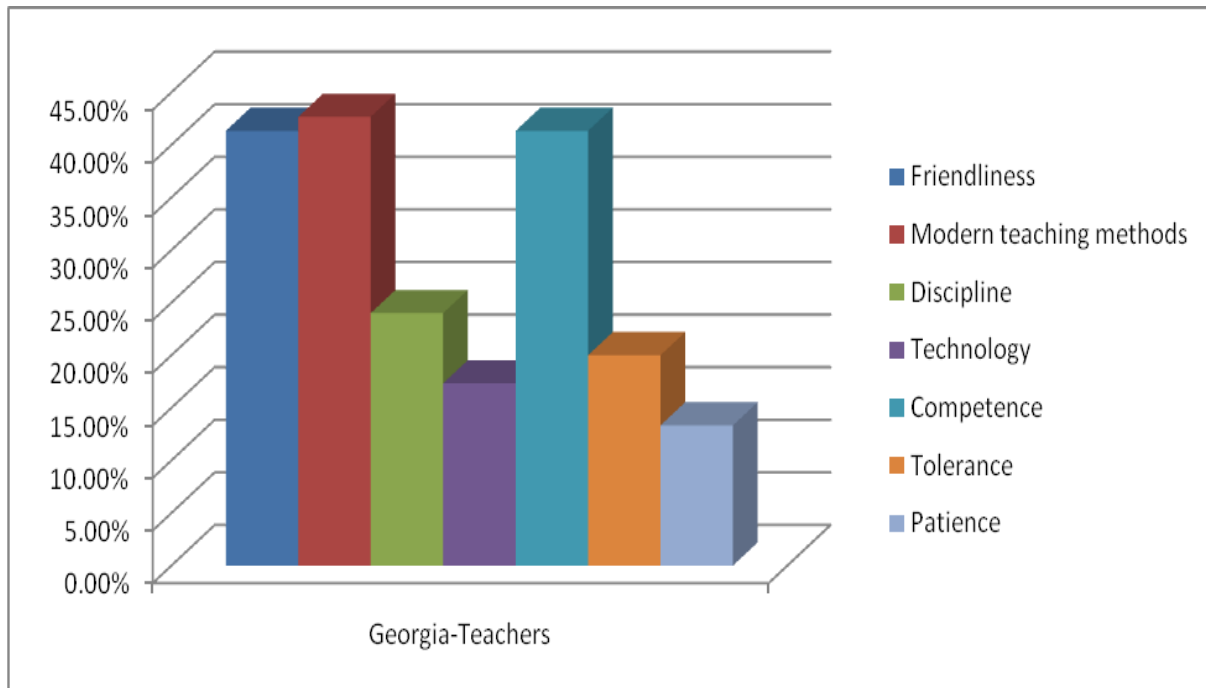


Figure 5. Georgian Teachers' Preferences

There are significant differences between the preferences of Georgian students and teachers. Georgian teachers gave the highest percentage to modern teaching methods (43%). After modern teaching methods come competence (41%) and friendliness (41%). Only in this set of data, is friendliness not first. Because Georgia was part of Soviet Union whose technology was one of the most developed, Georgian teachers put modern teaching methods ahead of friendliness. Both Georgian students and teachers believe that patience is not a significant personality trait that excellent teachers should have: they give patience almost the same percentage (13%). As a result of the data provided above, Georgian teachers emphasize the importance of the human dimension and put an almost equal weight on modern teaching methods and competence. Unlike Nigeria, Georgian students have high expectations of their teachers due to their cultural background.

Table 5: Cambodian Students' Preferences

	1 st Feature	2 nd Feature	3 rd Feature	Total Score	Percentage
friendliness	37	23	19	176	59.00%
modern methods	13	14	20	87	29.00%
discipline	2	3	5	17	5.67%
technology	11	15	8	71	23.67%
competence	12	16	18	86	28.67%
tolerance	15	19	15	98	32.67%
patience	10	10	15	65	21.67%

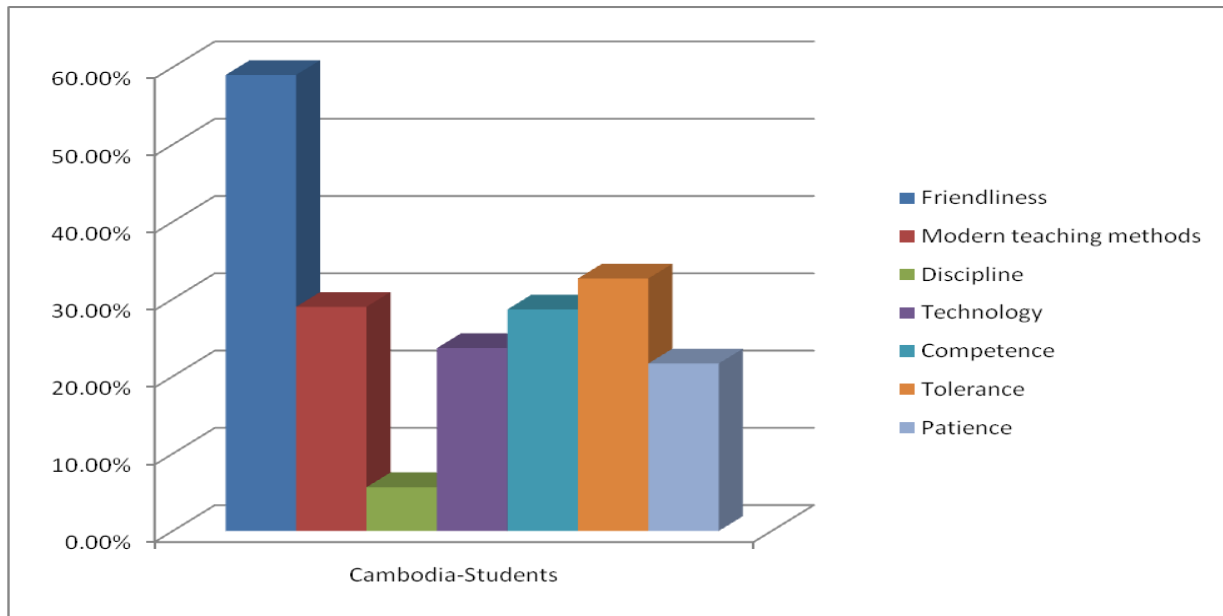


Figure 6. Cambodian Students' Preferences

Cambodia has suffered tremendously because of the civil war in the time of Pol Pot almost three decades ago. Almost half of the population lost their lives during the reign of Pol Pot. Cambodian students chose friendliness as the best feature of excellent teachers (59%) and discipline as their least choice (5%). The two most preferred features are friendliness and tolerance(33%). Friendliness and tolerance received the highest weighted scores in Cambodia. As seen in Georgian example, Cambodian students may make their choices of characteristics of excellent teachers according to their cultural and historical experiences. As a result, Cambodian students regard excellent teachers as friendly, tolerant, modern, and competent in their teaching.

Table 6: Cambodian Teachers' Preferences

	1 st Feature	2 nd Feature	3 rd Feature	Total Score	Percentage
friendliness	10	3	2	38	50.67%
modern methods	8	4	3	35	46.67%
discipline	3	7	5	28	37.33%
technology	0	3	1	7	9.33%
competence	1	1	2	7	9.33%
tolerance	0	5	3	13	17.33%
patience	3	2	9	22	29.33%

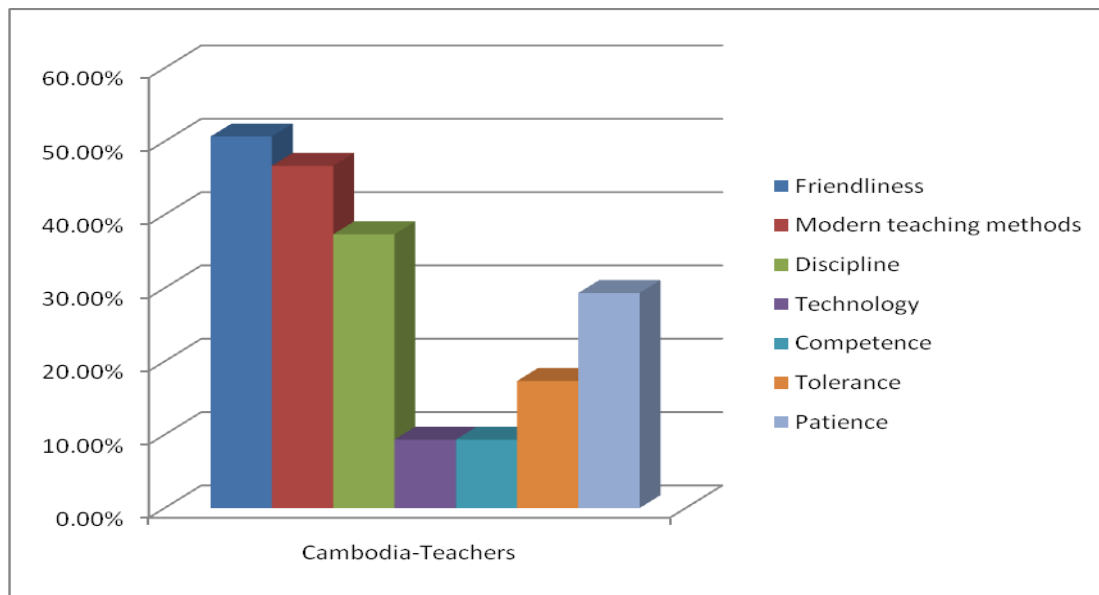


Figure 7. Cambodian Teachers' Preferences

Cambodian teachers, according to Table 6, define excellent teachers as friendly (51%), good at using modern teaching methods (47%), and discipline (37%) in their teaching. Patience is also highly valued (29%). Cambodian teachers put technology and competence in the last place with the same percentage (9%). The most significant data between Cambodian students and teachers is about discipline. Unlike Cambodian students, Cambodian teachers give much higher priority to discipline.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that all students want to see friendly teachers in their classes. Building and sustaining relationships are the basis for the rewards for the teaching profession (Kottler et al., 2005, p. ix). In the countries under the study, friendliness has been given the highest score by the students. Students want teachers who care about them and demonstrate their care. Students in different countries may have different best features to define excellent teachers so that it is considerably cultural bound. Teachers who are considered excellent in one specific cultural setting may not be considered that excellent in another cultural setting. Students become more aware of competence and demanding as the level of development of the country gets higher. More developed a country is more aware of competence and demanding students are.

Discipline is more accepted in less developed countries than more developed ones. The historical background of a country affects expectations especially about authoritative managements. It is obvious that teachers' understanding and students' understanding of what characteristics excellent teacher possess are different. Though there are some similarities, there are also significant differences. Teachers should reconsider their beliefs about qualities an excellent teacher has and take into account students' expectations as well. In more developed countries, teachers and students regard competence and modernity in teaching as an indicative of excellent teachers.

Implications

The command of subject matter and application of a methodology are important ingredients of teaching excellence, but they are not enough. Excellent teachers should think about the human dimension of their teaching. As Kottler et al., (2005) puts the importance of human dimension:

Children appreciate people who are genuinely caring and loving toward them. This is why the best teachers are so much more than experts in their fields and more than interesting personalities- they are individuals whom children trust, they are adults who are perceived as safe and kind and caring. Even when they are in a bad mood, give difficult assignments, or have to teach units that are relatively boring, compassionate teachers will get the benefit of the doubt from students. (p.11)

There is a common belief that people's professional lives are different from their private lives. This might be true for some professions but as for the profession of teacher, there is a direct relationship between a teacher's personal life and professional life. Jersild (1955) was among the first of modern-day educators to focus attention on the connection between teachers' personal lives and their professional effectiveness. He maintained that understanding oneself is the single most important task in the growth toward developing healthy attitudes of self-acceptance. The basic idea is that to help others, you must be intimately aware of your own strengths and limitations so that you can present yourself in ways that are optimally effective. Boy and Pine (1971) also believe that continuous, balanced development in human, vocational, spiritual, and recreational areas is essential for all teachers to thrive in their work and lives.

Educational policy makers generally underline qualifications having to do with professional values. The study has revealed that the human dimension is as important as professional values. Therefore, there must be a method of assessment in the process of determination of good qualifications that excellent teachers should have. Values and beliefs are not standardized. They differentiate from one society to another. In today's global world, teachers as well as students are mobile. Therefore, understanding of what makes an excellent teacher is not same in all cultures. Teachers need to take into account cultural differences not to get disappointed.

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