

## Malaysian School English Language Teachers' Perceptions on Teaching and Learning

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### ABSTRACT

Studies on school teachers' perceptions toward teaching and learning have shown inconsistent results which call for further research in the area. This study was an attempt to investigate the perceptions of teachers towards Teaching and Learning of the English Language. A Likert scale questionnaire with 33 items was developed by the researchers. A randomly selected group of Malaysian School English language teachers (n = 165) responded to the questionnaire. The descriptive statistics results indicated that the Malaysian School English Language Teachers' perceptions of teaching are mainly positive; such as having higher intrinsic interest in adopting teaching as profession, decreased tendency in perceiving Teaching as a stressful profession, understanding the significance of listening and speaking skills (commonly neglected skills), awareness of the advantages of having literature in the English classroom, showing interest in the knowledge about high frequency words and lexiles, and showing interest in knowing and understanding students' interests and problems. However, teachers' perceptions regarding the education system, resource adequacy, class size and in the teaching of the writing skill are negative in the analysis. The findings further indicate the teachers' technology illiteracy and although they acknowledge the supportive role of books in teaching language skills they seem not to be positive on the use of textbooks in the English classroom. The results have interesting implications for policy makers and researchers.

**Key words:** Perceptions, English Language Teaching, Malaysian Schools

### INTRODUCTION

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), the perceptions of teachers in the classroom are recognized to be based on their perceptions of their school, students, administration, curriculum and the society. It determines their impact on the process of teaching and learning of English.

The importance of teachers' beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and practices in understanding the educational process and improving it is recognized in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) Report on Education (2009, p. 89). They are not only closely connected to teachers' strategies to cope with the daily professional life challenges but also to their well-being. On the other hand, they play a crucial role in shaping students' learning environment and in influencing their motivation and achievement.

There is a consensus among researchers that positive attitudes towards teaching is a result of teachers' personal beliefs and their personal experience. Various scholars are unanimous on this correlation (Duartepe & Akkuş-Çıkla, 2004; Issan et al., 2011; Al Harthy, Jamaluddin, & Abedalaziz, 2013; Akbaba, 2013; Bhargava & Pathy, 2014).

Based on teachers' perceptions, there has been a consistency and inconsistency found in results between

teachers' attitudes and age. Some studies found the relationship negative. It is reported by Gupta (1979) that the increase in age makes the attitudes negative. However, some studies found a positive relationship between the teachers' age and their attitude of teachers towards teaching profession (Jaleel & Pillay, 1979; Bhandarkar, 1980).

### Objectives and Research Questions

The objective of the current study was to explore a group of Malaysian School English language teacher's perceptions towards the Teaching Profession, Teaching environment, the Teaching of Skill areas, Teaching Material, the Teaching of Reading and Vocabulary, and Teachers' perceptions on their Students. More specifically the following research question was addressed to meet this objective:

#### Research Question

1. What are the Malaysian English language teachers' perceptions towards the Teaching Profession?
2. What are the Malaysian English language teachers' perceptions towards the teaching environment?
3. What are the Malaysian English language teachers' perceptions towards teaching of Skill areas?

4. What are the Malaysian English language teachers' perceptions towards teaching Materials?
5. What are the Malaysian English language teachers' perceptions towards the teaching of Reading and Vocabulary?
6. What are the Malaysian English language teachers' perceptions towards students?

## METHOD

Quantitative methods were followed to collect and analyze the data in this study which was cross-sectional in design.

### Sample

The respondents were 165 Malaysian School English language teachers who were randomly selected from the wider population of School English language teachers in Melaka, Malaysia.

### Instrument

This was a questionnaire developed by the researchers and validated by a group of experts. The questionnaire was a 5-point Likert style instrument with 33 items (Appendix A). It started with a demographic information section followed by six different domains which focused on teachers' perceptions towards (i) the profession, (ii) teaching environment, (iii) teaching of skill areas, (iv) teaching materials, (v) teaching of reading and vocabulary, and (vi) students. The internal reliability of the instrument was 0.78 which indicates an acceptable level of consistency.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected using Google Forms. The link was shared with the selected teachers who responded to and submitted the responses online. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods and SPSS (version 24).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is noticeable in the current study that 88(59%) teachers were between the ages of 31 to 50 as indicated in Table 1. This age group is likely to determine the Teachers' perceptions regarding teaching learning processes.

### Teaching Profession and Individual

In recent years, the focus of researchers has been teachers' perceptions of school environment, teacher stress, and job satisfaction (Shann, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Wilson, 2002). Research also indicates the effect of all these factors on teachers' motivation, engagement, and commitment to teaching and students' responsibility and academic performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Chen, 2007; Weiss, 1999). Research showed an increase in teaching efficacy and teachers' job satisfaction as a result of a positive school environment (Taylor & Tashakkori, 2010), and a decrease in workload stress (Collie et al., 2012).

However, the present study reports 'Teaching as a stressful profession' (M=2.99) with equal percent of participants (34%) indicated by statement number 4 in Table 2. Researchers also support the claim that the teaching is more stressful job in comparison to other jobs, (Chaplain, 2008; De Nobile & McCormick, 2005; Kyriacou, 2001). In recent years, the findings of research by Tran (2015) endorse 'teaching as stressful profession'. It also adds that *teacher stress* is mainly due to *student behavior stress* and *workload stress* and this affected their capabilities in managing students' behavior, engaging students in learning, or applying effective instructional strategies in the classrooms.

The current study reports 82.3% of participants disagreed that they had no interest in teaching with the lowest mean score (M=1.81). Bozdoğan, Aydın, and Yıldırım (2007) highlight that if someone considers their job not appropriate then the individual is not likely to attempt to be successful and happy with the job. With regards "Teaching as a job guaranteeing profession", 53.1% of responses in the present study indicated that their choice of teaching is not based on the perception of it as a job-guaranteeing profession. The data also indicates teachers' instrumental motivation being lower. On the contrary, their intrinsic motivation seems higher. Their higher intrinsic motivation can be supported with some previous research which indicates that Teachers' job satisfaction has a positive relationship to their motivation, well-being, and commitment to teaching (Feather & Rauter, 2004; Vansteenkiste et al., 2007). 'System as a demotivating factor' scored the highest mean (M=3.88) with 74.3 percent of responses indicating that the system is a threatening and demotivating factor to good teaching.

### Teaching Environment

The current study reports that a huge number of teacher participants, 93% (M=4.26) are teaching mixed-ability stu-

**Table 1.** Frequency and percentage of teachers across age groups

	Age groups	f	%
1.	31-40	50	30
2.	41-50	48	29
3.	19-30	35	21
4.	51-63	31	18
Total		165	100

**Table 2.** Questions about teaching profession and individual

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	No interest in teaching	1.81	1.094
2.	Teaching: a job guaranteeing profession	2.68	1.337
3.	System: demotivating factor	3.88	1.014
4.	Teaching: a stressful profession	2.99	1.208

dents (as indicated in Table 3). In addition, 65.2% of teacher participants also confirmed that their English classes are poorly equipped (M=3.55).

Moreover, 56.1 % participants confirmed teaching too many classes and 53% of participants confirmed excessive number of students in their classrooms. The findings reveal that these factors seem prominently affecting teachers and their teaching.

**Teaching Skill Areas**

For more than six decades now, as Brown (2001) states, research and practice in English language teaching has identified the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing as of paramount importance. Therefore, a great emphasis is put on the teaching and learning of the four skills of English. The current study reports the concerns of teachers regarding the teaching of language skills. Out of all language skills, Teaching writing is found the most difficult skill' with the highest mean score of M=3.43 as indicated in Table 4, 63.4 percent teachers showed strong agreement with the statement. This finding is consistent with the findings reported by Arficho (2018) which state that writing in secondary schools is found to be difficult to teach and learn. It is insufficient (as in emphasis) and this proved to be detrimental in the development of the students' writing ability. Furthermore, the study also found that writing activities in the textbook are not effective to teach writing. In contrast to this around 47(M=2.82) percent of participants in the current study did not think that textbooks are unsupportive in teaching skills whereas only 26.9 percent of responses supported it. 'The supportive role of textbooks' is also acknowledged by Shafiee Nahrkhalaji (2012) who consider ELT

textbooks motivating for learners and enhancing teachers' effectiveness. In contrast to teaching writing, teachers did not find teaching reading a boring job. This was confirmed by 67.7 percent responses (M=2.29). 49.4(M=2.78) percent of teachers negate that they do not spend time on listening and speaking whereas 33.3 percent responses showed agreement. This indicates that teachers are able to diagnose which skill is hard to teach and which is not. However, 72.5 percent also indicate that participants find all skills collectively difficult to teach.

**TEACHING MATERIAL**

Nikou and Sadeghi (2012) highlight teaching resources as one of the influencing components in the teaching-learning process. The resources teachers use help to develop motivation and a sense of creativity in the classroom and this enhances learning.

The study reports the findings regarding the perceptions of teachers on using material for the teaching learning process in the English class. The results indicate that 40.2(M=2.91) percent of teachers do not prefer using the textbooks for teaching. However, a higher percentage of teachers 44.6(M=2.79) also do not prefer revision books for teaching either. These findings are further supported by the 53.7(M=2.69) percent responses which do not find books helpful for teaching. However, on the contrary, Sadeghi & Nikou (2012) reported Textbooks and Workbooks are the most commonly used materials by teachers.

In response to statement number 1 in Table 5, 42.1 percent responses indicate a Lack of technology for teaching support (M=2.95) however 35.3 percent of responses also negate this situation. The study also reported a huge percent of responses, 67.7, which indicate teacher's inefficiency in using technology for teaching purposes. This claim is further supported by similar findings reported by Sadeghi and Nikou (2012) who revealed in their study that the use of blackboards and pictures is widespread. Other technological tools such as the Computer, Video projector, TV set & CD or DVD player are not commonly utilized by many teachers. This indicates teachers' incompetence in using technology.

**Teaching Reading and Vocabulary**

On the contrary to the assumption that students do not like reading, this research finds out that 65.9 percent of students

**Table 3.** Questions about the teaching environment

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	Poor equipment in English classroom	3.55	1.011
2.	Excessive number of students in English classes	3.30	1.184
3.	Over teaching	3.46	1.230
4.	Teaching mixed-ability students	4.26	0.623

**Table 4.** Questions about teaching skill areas

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	Difficulty in teaching all language skills	2.26	0.850
2.	Teaching writing: The most difficult skill	3.43	1.141
3.	Teaching Reading skill: a boring job	2.29	0.913
4.	Spending no time on listening and speaking	2.78	1.057
5.	Unsupportive role of School textbooks in teaching skills	2.82	1.131

**Table 5.** Question about materials

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	Lack of technology for teaching support	2.95	1.112
2.	Textbooks: not helpful aid in teaching	2.69	1.127
3.	Rare use of technology because of inefficiency in its use.	2.27	1.082
4.	Preference towards using the textbook in teaching	2.91	1.038
5.	Use of the revision book	2.79	1.036

like to read with the highest mean score ( $M=3.54$ ). The 2012 study by Badea surveyed students' perceptions of the way in which teaching reading skills should be applied at academic level. The study reported a noticeable finding; that the lack of students' interest in reading lie in the failure of addressing students' expectations and needs. 70 percent ( $M=2.38$ ) of teachers do not use extra books in the classroom. However, interestingly, the majority of teachers' responses 67.1( $M=2.29$ ) indicate that they find themselves good at teaching reading. The majority of teachers (72.5%) claim that they also assign reading based projects to their students. They also believe (70%) that the literature component is not given serious attention. Zengin, Bařal and Ykselir (2019) investigated the perceptions of English language teachers and instructors towards the use of literature in language teaching. Their findings indicated the high awareness of most of English teachers regarding the importance of using and benefiting from literature for teaching English. Their findings also supported the use of novels, poems and short stories as a helpful and contributing factor in improving students' proficiency in reading, vocabulary learning, grammar and writing.

The present study reveals contradicting findings that indicate that the majority of teachers, 64.6% (the highest mean  $M=2.46$ ) do not depend on reading material for learning vocabulary, as indicated in Table 6.

There is an encouraging finding that 83.5% ( $M=1.91$ ) teachers are aware about the most of common words in the English language. Similarly, only 14.6 percent of teachers ( $M=2.43$ ) showed their unawareness regarding the concept of Lexiles in reading. However, from 93 to 95 percent of teachers have little knowledge about repetition, recycling and extensive reading in vocabulary development, as indicated in Table 7.

### Students

There has been consensus among researchers that within the context of English language learning "instrumental motivation" is likely to be the main driving force determining students' attitude towards the English language. Al-Tamimi et al. (2009), Al Mamun et al. (2012), Alfawzan (2012) find that instrumental motivation plays a principal role in the process of learning English which results in students' positive attitudes towards the English language, its culture, and the use of English in social and educational contexts.

The present study reports the findings regarding students' interest, preference and exposure with regards English language learning. These findings seem to be associated to the highest mean scores of the study. Regarding exposure to English outside the classroom, 75.6 percent of responses are in agreement with the mean score ( $M=3.86$ ) which indicates the absence of possibilities of learning English language within real life contexts. The prevalent perception that students study only for their examinations is confirmed with 75.6 % of teacher responses ( $M= 3.85$ ). These findings seem to be in consistency with 53.1 percent responses of teachers who feel students do not see the value of learning a second language. 53 percent of teachers do not agree that their

**Table 6.** Questions about reading

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	Lacking efficiency for teaching reading	2.29	0.812
2.	Students' lack of interest in reading	3.54	1.169
3.	Avoiding assigning reading based project work	2.25	1.029
4.	Use of extra story books for motivating students to read.	2.38	0.94900
5.	Taking literature component not seriously enough	2.24	1.040

**Table 7.** Questions about vocabulary

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	Unawareness about the most common words in the English language	1.91	0.854
2.	Unawareness of the concept of lexiles in reading	2.43	0.979
3.	Dependence on the textbook for vocabulary learning	2.46	1.041
4.	Awareness about extensive reading as helpful factor in building vocabulary	1.61	0.746
5.	Knowledge about repetition and recycling and contribution to consolidation of vocabulary	1.68	0.669

**Table 8.** Questions about students

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
1.	Never interested in learning English	2.81	1.159
2.	Do not value the 2nd language	3.31	1.196
3.	Study only for examinations	3.85	0.935
4.	Hardly exposed to English outside classrooms	3.86	1.021
5.	Students preference for going to tuition classrooms after school	3.17	0.963

students are not interested in learning English as indicated in Table 8.

### CONCLUSION

The present study indicates that Malaysian school teachers have positive perceptions of the teaching profession. However, they perceive their teaching environments most unfavorably. Their perceptions about the teaching of skill areas, teaching material and in the teaching of reading and vocabulary seem likely to change depending on their teaching environment and students. The study provides clear evidence of the possible inter-correlations among the school envi-

ronment, technology literacy and teaching language skill (Sadeghi & Nikou, 2012; Tran, 2015; Arficho, 2018). Based on these findings, Educators and administrators may recognize the detrimental factors to teaching-learning and find effective solutions to improve the situation.

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APPENDIX

**A. Questionnaire of Teachers' Perceptions towards Learning and Teaching**

*A. Personal Information*

Please answer the following questions.

Age (in years): \_\_\_\_\_

Degrees:

B.Ed

BA

MA/MSc

PhD

Major at College or University  
\_\_\_\_\_

Minor at College or University  
\_\_\_\_\_

Number of years Teaching English:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Primary or Secondary?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B. Questions about Teaching Profession and Individual**

Answer the questions in this section and the other sections that follow using this key:

- 1: Strongly disagree
- 2: Disagree
- 3: Undecided
- 4: Agree
- 5: Strongly agree

- 1. I was never interested in teaching 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 2. I went into teaching because a job was guaranteed 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 3. Teaching can be good but the system demotivates me 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 4. Teaching is very stressful 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○

**C. Questions about the Teaching Environment**

- 1. Classrooms are poorly equipped for teaching English 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 2. I have too many students in my English classes 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 3. I teach too many classes 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 4. I teach to mixed-ability students 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○

**D. Questions about Teaching Skill Areas**

- 1. I find all skill areas difficult to teach 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 2. The writing skill is the most difficult 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 3. Teaching Reading is boring 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 4. I do not spend much time on listening and speaking 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○
- 5. The textbook does not support the teaching of skills 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○

**E. Questions about Materials**

- |                                                               |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. The school does not have technology to support my teaching | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. The textbook is never of much help                         | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. I am not good with technology so I rarely use it           | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. I only use the textbook in teaching                        | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I use the revision book most of the time                   | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |

**F. Questions about Reading**

- |                                                                 |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. I am not good at teaching reading                            | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. My students don't like to read                               | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. I never have project work where they have to read            | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. I use extra story books/readers to get students to read more | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I do not take the literature component seriously             | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |

**G. Questions about Vocabulary**

- |                                                                           |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. I am not aware of the most common words in the English language        | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. I am not aware of the concept of lexiles in reading                    | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. I depend on the textbook on vocabulary learning                        | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. I am aware that extensive reading helps in building vocabulary         | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I know that repetition and recycling helps in consolidating vocabulary | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |

**H. Questions about Students**

- |                                                                  |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |   |                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Students are never interested in learning English             | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Students do not see the value of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> language | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Students only want to study for examinations                  | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Students are hardly exposed to English outside classrooms     | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. Students prefer going to tuition classrooms after school      | 1 | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | <input type="radio"/> |