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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE  
TEACHERS**

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Graduation Thesis

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research was to investigate and analyse secondary school students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective English teachers. Furthermore, the aim was to examine how the variables of school type, gender and achievement influenced students' perceptions of effective teaching practice. The study was conducted on 95 secondary school students attending language grammar school and vocational technical school. The data was collected using a questionnaire with one open-ended question in which the participants were asked to provide short-essay responses on the characteristics of effective teachers. The data were subjected to the process of qualitative content analysis and were coded into the categories of subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, socio-affective skills and personality characteristics. The results showed that secondary school students considered pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills to be the most important characteristics of effective teachers. Furthermore, the study findings were used to construct the profile of an effective secondary school English teacher and their use as a valuable source for teachers' self-reflection and evaluation was advised.

**Key words:** perceptions, effective, teacher, language

# 1 Introduction

Teachers play a tremendously important role in the educational system as a whole. The role of the teacher is crucial for the quality of a school and the quality of student learning (den Brok et al., 2002). Because of their vital role in educating young people, the essential issue in question, regarding the quality of education, are the characteristics that teachers ought to possess in order to be regarded as effective teachers. The qualities of effective teachers are difficult to define and there is still no universal agreement on what constitutes that kind of teaching (Campbell et al., 2004).

A possible method for tackling this question is to take into consideration students' perceptions. Students are certainly a valuable source of information on this issue as they, during their long educational experience, encounter various teachers with different characteristics. By working with teachers on a daily basis, they have a direct experience of various classroom practices and are able to identify which practices they consider to be effective. However, it is important to take into account that each student has a very unique set of experiences and perceptions (Lavin et al., 2012). Therefore, students' perceptions are a reflection of their personal experience, beliefs and expectations, although they still provide valuable data on teaching effectiveness.

Information on effective teaching practices obtained by students can be particularly useful to teachers. After all, students are teachers' first "clients" and their expectations and beliefs will determine the extent to which they will be satisfied with their teachers. If they are familiar with students' expectations, teachers can modify their behaviour and practices, which should result in students' greater satisfaction with classroom learning. Therefore, teachers can use students' perceptions as a starting point for reflection and improvement.

Apart from the general concept of effective teaching, the same issue can be explored in more specific areas. As today there is, due to globalization processes, a growing demand for learning foreign languages, effective language teaching is certainly an important issue to explore within the domain of teaching effectiveness.

## **2 Theoretical background**

The goal of education is for students to acquire not only knowledge and understanding of subject matter, but also different skills and attitudes. Teachers carry out various activities trying to help their students acquire that knowledge in a successful way. The way these activities are performed influences the students' learning process and the skills they ultimately acquire during that process (Shuell, 1996). Therefore, it is crucial for students' success that teachers perform activities in an effective way. The term 'effective' has a different meaning for each student and teacher and researchers have still not agreed on one universal definition of 'effective teaching'. This problem of defining effectiveness in teaching has been present in the field for a long time and is closely related to the existence of various views on teaching.

### **2.1 Historical overview**

Different conceptions of teaching have existed for centuries in the field of education and have been influenced by an old philosophical discussion on the nature of education. Usually these different conceptions can be summarized as a 'battle' between teacher-directed and student-centered views of education (Shuell, 1996). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to Shuell (1996), the prevailing model in American education was a factory model of schooling which was based on an Industrial Revolution world view. Within that model teachers played the traditional role of authority figures whose task was to disseminate knowledge to students through lectures. The very knowledge was seen as something that existed in some tangible form and could be passed on to students in that same form (Shuell, 1996). Given the importance assigned to teachers in that period, the consequence that followed was a large amount of research on teaching.

In the context where the teacher played a vital role in transferring knowledge to students arose the issue of teaching effectiveness, which was actually one of the first questions addressed by educational researchers in the US. The first study that dealt with effective teachers and students' perceptions of their qualities was Kratz's study conducted in 1896. In his research Kratz questioned over 2000 children in Grades 2 through 8 about the characteristics of their best teachers. The interest for the issue continued to rise and by the early 1970s over 10.000 similar studies on teaching effectiveness had been published (Shuell, 1996). However, as Shuell (1996) pointed out, those early studies on teaching effectiveness

focused on teachers and their behaviour, completely disregarding the role played by the student and the whole teaching-learning process that occurred in the classroom.

In the 1960s and early 1970s researchers began to study interactions between the teacher and the students in the actual classroom environment and that shift in perspective resulted in quick development of research on teaching. What contributed significantly to the knowledge about teaching was the process-product research of the 1970s and 1980s (Shuell, 1996). The very name indicates that researchers focused on classroom processes and learning outcomes. The main idea of process-product or process-outcome research was linking teacher behaviour to student achievement (Brophy and Good, 1984). It is important to notice that Brophy and Good (1984) avoided the term 'teacher effectiveness' research because they did not want to suggest that 'effectiveness' implied only learning achievement, because depending on different definitions it could include affective and personal development and success in socializing students. According to Campbell et al. (2004), process-product research started in the late 1960s in the US. Researchers tested students using standardised achievement tests and observed teachers using structured observation instruments. Teaching factors that these studies found to be correlated with students' success were classroom and behaviour management, classroom climate, direct and interactive teaching and the use of a variety of teaching strategies. All these factors could be put together into one teaching method known as 'direct instruction', 'active teaching' or 'whole-class interactive teaching' (Campbell et al., 2004). However, according to Shuell (1996), the problem with the process-product research was little emphasis given to students' psychological processes that are responsible for the acquisition of the outcomes.

In the 1980s alternative conceptions of teaching and learning emerged and brought new views on the role of a teacher. Teachers were no longer supposed to disseminate knowledge to students, but they had to create learning environments in which students would also be engaged in appropriate instructional activities. In that way teachers and students became partners in the learning process during which students constructed their own understanding of the subject matter covered in the classroom (Shuell, 1996). Today, according to Shuell (1996), researchers mostly agree that teaching and learning "are essentially a social and linguistic process (a process of communication) rather than merely cognitive ones" (p. 743). Therefore, given the existence of these different ideas about teaching, it is not surprising that there is still a lot of disagreement on the definition of effective teaching.



## 2.2 Effective teaching – defining the term

Due to individual differences and expectations, the term ‘effective teaching’ is interpreted differently by different individuals. Because of that it is difficult to identify the ideal qualities that would be common to all effective teachers. According to Tuckman (1995), apart from the lack of agreement on the definition of effective teaching, there is also major controversy over its description. However, even if the elements of effective teaching were identified and agreed upon, another problem would be how to assess and measure those elements (Tuckman, 1995). Despite the disagreement on the issue, it is still important to consider various attempts made at identifying the qualities of effective teachers.

In the first place, there are definitions that describe effective teaching in terms of the end result of learning, which is in line with the above mentioned process-product research. According to Stronge (2002, as cited in Arikan et al., 2008), an effective teacher is either a teacher whose work results in a class of high-achieving students or one who is positively evaluated by supervisors or administrators. In the same way, Tuckman (1995) describes effective teachers as teachers whose students learn and grow most and who are accepted by their colleagues and other educational professionals. Thus, according to these ideas, teaching effectiveness is reflected in students’ academic achievement and colleagues’ positive assessment. Similarly, in his research, Walker (2008) employs the term ‘effective’ to describe teachers who are the most successful in helping students to learn. Furthermore, by summarizing studies on effective teaching, Rosenshine and Stevens (1986, as cited in Shuell, 1996) identify six teaching functions that focus on effective teachers’ behaviour and define effectiveness in terms of student achievement. Six teaching functions are supposed to identify specific teaching classroom practices that are related to students’ academic success. According to Rosenshine and Stevens (1986, as cited in Shuell, 1996), these characteristics of effective teaching are daily review and checking homework, presentation, guided practice, correctives and feedback, independent practice and weekly and monthly reviews. However, defining effective teaching in terms of student achievement is problematic because it includes the need to measure student learning and success. Firstly, the problem is how to measure students’ growth over a certain period of time. Secondly, in addition to students’ individual differences, parents’ influence and many others, teachers are only one of the factors that influence student learning (Tuckman, 1995).

In the second place, apart from focusing on the end result, the literature also describes effective teaching in terms of the teaching process. According to Benson et al. (2001, as cited in Arikan et al., 2008), an effective teacher delivers information to students “in a way that is clear, understandable and motivating” (p. 43). In the same way, according to Stephens and Crawley (1994, as cited in Arikan et al., 2008), a distinctive quality of effective teachers is the ability to present information in such a way that students can understand it and relate to it. Therefore, in these cases the focus is not on students’ success and the final result of learning, but on the teaching process that precedes it. Different researchers emphasise different aspects of the teaching process as being important characteristics of effective teaching. According to Levy et al. (2003), a productive and stable classroom atmosphere represents the essence of teaching effectiveness and depends on the kind of communication that teachers and students have. Similarly, Young and Shaw (1999, as cited in Arikan et al., 2008) accentuate the importance of effective communication, a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom, the teacher’s interest in students’ learning, the way teachers organize the course and the way they motivate their students. Based on their PhD researches, Clark and Walsh (2002) have developed a model of effective teachers which is based on several characteristics that are essential for teaching effectiveness. These are: content knowledge, pedagogical skills, knowledge of the context in which they are teaching and personal knowledge that includes a firm moral code, a concern for individual students and the ability to form relationships with students. Thus, according to these descriptions, the essential characteristics of effective teachers are their content knowledge, their ability to create a positive classroom atmosphere and their ability to form a caring relationship with their students.

As it has already been mentioned, students’ opinions and expectations are important because their achievement and their satisfaction with the classroom learning process will be influenced, among other factors, by their teachers as well. According to Hill (2014), graduate students’ opinions are in line with the theory of research on teaching effectiveness. Apart from the subject content and the way that content is presented, students give more importance to the affective component of the teaching-learning process. In particular, they value affective and emotional processes involved in the learning process, strong relationships with their teachers and the way teachers care about their learning and their ability to apply the acquired knowledge (Hill, 2014). Similarly, Stephens and Crawley (1994) emphasise that good teaching depends more on style than on content because students are less interested in what

teachers present and more in whether that content is presented in a compelling, enjoyable and understandable way.

### **2.2.1 Effective language teaching**

Some of the effective teachers' characteristics identified in literature can be applied to effective teachers specialized in a variety of subjects. However, according to Bell (2005), because of the uniqueness of every discipline, there are also some effective teaching behaviours and attitudes that are considered to be discipline specific. Therefore, apart from the idea of teaching effectiveness in general, a specific issue important to consider is teaching effectiveness in the domain of language teaching and learning.

In the first place, the specificity of language teaching and learning in a second language (L2) classroom lies in the fact that "the content and the process for learning the content are the same. In other words, in foreign language teaching, the medium is the message" (Hammadou and Bernhardt, 1987, as cited in Borg, 2006, p. 5), which means that teachers teach subject matter by means of the very subject that is being taught - L2. As a consequence, according to Brown (2009), objectives, tasks and approaches characteristic of an L2 classroom are different from those that characterise the classrooms of other subjects. Furthermore, what distinguishes language teachers from teachers of other subjects are "the nature of the subject, the content of teaching, the teaching methodology, teacher-learner relationships and contrasts between native and non-native speakers" (Borg, 2006, p. 6). This implies that language teaching methods are based on discipline-specific techniques, strategies and activities. Apart from language teaching, language learning is also a complex issue because it involves not only cognitive processes, but it also influences students' cultural and self-identity (Brown, 2006). Being exposed to and learning about the language, culture and communication of a community different from theirs influences the way students perceive themselves and the world around them.

In the second place, the uniqueness of language teaching and its effectiveness is related to the changing nature of L2 acquisition and pedagogical theories (Brown, 2006). The constant development of L2 acquisition theories and methodologies renders it difficult for researchers to define one type of effective language teaching. For example, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, communicative and interactive approaches started to gain prominence over grammar-based approaches, which resulted in changing methods that teachers employed to teach foreign

languages (Bell, 2005). These kinds of shifts within the domain of language teaching require teachers to constantly update their knowledge on language teaching methodologies. According to Shulman (1986, as cited in Park and Lee, 2006), due to the importance of foreign language learning theories and teaching methods, those theories and methods should be thoroughly studied by prospective teachers in order to enrich their pedagogical knowledge.

According to Bell (2005), foreign language teaching is a complex and multidimensional process that can be interpreted differently by different individuals. Due to "the multifaceted nature of second language acquisition and its equally complex relationship to L2 pedagogy" (Brown, 2006, p. 38), researchers have still not agreed on one single definition of effective language teaching. Contemporary trends in foreign language teaching methodology might be helpful as they reflect what teaching practices researchers and language teachers consider to be effective (Bell, 2005). Furthermore, as is the case with the definition of effective teaching in general, here it is also useful to take into consideration various attempts made at defining the qualities of effective language teachers. For example, Bell (2005) defines effective foreign language teaching as "clear and enthusiastic teaching that provides learners with the grammatical (syntactical and morphological), lexical, phonological, pragmatic, and sociocultural knowledge and interactive practice they need to communicate successfully in the target language" (p. 260). Based on language learners' opinions, Girard (1997, as cited in Borg, 2006) lists more particular characteristics of effective language teachers such as making lessons interesting and explaining the subject matter clearly, teaching good pronunciation and speaking good English, showing interest in all learners, having patience with them and encouraging them to participate in the course. However, some of the mentioned characteristics can be applied to effective teachers in general, not necessarily only to the discipline-specific ones. Similarly, the standards for foreign language teaching and learning developed by professional organizations in the US (AATF, 1989; AATSP, 1990; ACTFL, 1988; Schulz et al., 1993, as cited in Bell, 2005) include a lot of non-specific standards like communication, leadership skills, professional abilities and sensitivity towards different students. The ones that are specific for language teaching are foreign language proficiency and the ability to teach about the target culture. Therefore, according to the above mentioned ideas, the characteristics of effective foreign language teachers are subject knowledge including linguistic and cultural knowledge, the ability to teach and make lessons interesting,

high interest for all students and their individual needs, patience and organization and communication skills.

### **2.3 The role of students' perceptions**

As it has already been mentioned, students' perceptions can provide very useful information on the learning environment. Spending long periods of time with their teachers, students are exposed to both successful and less successful teaching practices and are therefore most authorized to express their opinions on teaching quality (Tuckman, 1995). According to Jakominić and Mihaljević Djigunović (2002), the importance of students' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions was acknowledged in the 1950s within the research on foreign language learning. Due to the specific nature of foreign language learning, students' attitudes and opinions have a more important role for learning languages than for learning other school subjects. In particular, Jakominić and Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) claim that students' attitudes towards teachers are one of the most important affective factors of foreign language learning. Many researches (Gardner, 1985, Mihaljević, 1991, Dörnyei, 2001, as cited in Jakominić and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) have emphasized the importance that students' attitudes towards teachers have for language teaching and learning processes. However, it is important to take into consideration students' individual differences and the fact that each student has their unique opinions and expectations. Students' perceptions are affected by several factors such as student and teacher gender and ethnic background, teacher experience, student achievement, student age and grade, class size and subject (Fisher et al., 2006; Levy et al., 2003). The combination of all variables influences students' perceptions and therefore results in the unique perception of each student.

Student achievement is determined by the way they perceive their teachers, not by the actual behaviour of those teachers (den Brok et al., 2002). This is due to the fact that students' perceptions influence reality or, in Schulz's (1996) words, "perception is reality for the individual learner" (p. 109, as cited in Brown, 2006). Based on that 'reality', students construct the perceptions of teacher behaviour which then influence the cognitive and affective outcomes of the learning process (Fisher et al., 2006). Apart from achievement and attitudes, it is important to emphasise that students' perceptions of teachers' characteristics influence students' motivation (Telli et al., 2008). Researchers and teachers have noticed the important role that motivation has as it "turned out to be a key to L2 acquisition as well as

general human learning” (Dörnyei, 1998, as cited in Park and Lee, 2006, p. 245). Therefore, the fact that students’ perceptions lead to motivation and that motivation leads to success shows the central role that students’ beliefs and perceptions have in L2 acquisition.

Given the importance of students’ perceptions, in order to be regarded as effective, it is crucial that teachers get familiar with students’ perceptions, beliefs and expectations. According to Brown (2009), if teachers and students understand each other’s perceptions, their understanding results in high motivation and satisfaction of both groups. Likewise, when teachers know what their students’ expectations are, they can adapt their behaviour and practices in order to meet those expectations. When teachers adopt a particular strategy, its effectiveness does not depend completely on the actual performance, but also on students’ attitudes towards that strategy (Brown, 2009). Therefore, the results of research on students’ perceptions and teaching effectiveness present a valuable source of information for teachers who strive to improve their teaching practice in order to facilitate students’ language acquisition. On the other hand, the disparity between students’ and teachers’ expectations can have a negative effect on students’ satisfaction with the learning environment and on their motivation to learn languages, which can eventually lead to the discontinuation of the study (Brown, 2009). The research into students’ and teachers’ beliefs is useful to predict possible conflicts and prevent negative consequences like student frustration and anxiety (Brown, 2006). Students can also construct different kinds of beliefs about language learning and teaching during their education. For example, in his study, Brown (2009) found out that while teachers were in favour of a communicative approach, students emphasised only the need for grammar practice. In cases such as that one, if they are aware of students’ beliefs, teachers can help them take a broader view of L2 acquisition, which should have a positive impact on the satisfaction of both sides and on the quality of classroom processes.

To sum up, students’ perceptions and beliefs play a decisive role in the outcome of the language teaching and learning process. If there is a mismatch between what teachers do and what students expect them to do, then teachers should address those problematic areas in order to create a positive, trusting and supportive atmosphere (Barnes and Lock, 2013). Likewise, teachers should address students’ various beliefs about effective teaching practices by discussing current second language acquisition theories and methods with them (Park and Lee, 2006). As a result, the difference between students’ and teachers’ perceptions and beliefs

should be as small as possible, which should contribute significantly to the success of language learning process.

## **2.4 Previous research on effective teaching**

### **2.4.1 Research on the characteristics of effective teachers**

As it has already been mentioned, the first research dealing with the characteristics of effective teachers was Kratz's research conducted in 1896. The qualities that 2000 pupils identified as characteristics of their best teachers were: "helped in studies", "personal appearance", "good and kind", "patient", "polite" and "neat" (Shuell, 1996). In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a growing amount of research in the area of teaching effectiveness (Taylor, 1962; Nash, 1974; Taşkafa, 1989). Taylor (1962, as cited in Kyriacou, 1983) and Nash (1974, as cited in Kyriacou, 1983) analysed secondary school pupils' views on the characteristics of good teachers. Based on the pupils' responses, Taylor (1962, as cited in Kyriacou, 1983) concluded that the good teacher was fair, friendly with children, kept order in the classroom, explained and helped with the work that had to be done. Similarly, Nash (1974, as cited in Kyriacou, 1983) concluded that pupils wanted their teacher to be interesting, fair, friendly, and to explain, teach and keep order. Taşkafa (1989, as cited in Telli et al., 2008) interviewed 34 middle school students asking them about both the desirable and non-desirable characteristics of their teachers. As the most desirable characteristics, the students emphasized positive reinforcement, friendly interaction and an understanding of students' feelings. On the other hand, non-desirable characteristics were isolating or giving preferential treatment to some students, sneering at students and not giving them chances to perform or talk in class.

During the last decade researchers conducted numerous studies on teaching effectiveness [Ralph (2003), Telli et al., (2008), Walker (2008)]. In his study, Ralph (2003, as cited in Delaney et al., 2010) identified five crucial characteristics of effective teachers based on the students' ranking of 32 hypothetical instructor profiles. The identified characteristics were knowledge of the material, organization and management of the environment, the desire to improve, commitment to learners and collaboration with others. Telli et al. (2008) analysed teachers' and students' opinions in order to describe the characteristics of an ideal Turkish teacher. The ideal teacher was someone who guided, motivated, encouraged and gave confidence to students, built positive relationships with them and earned their respect. On the

other hand, the opposite of an ideal teacher was a disorganized person who criticized a lot, behaved inconsistently and was suspicious about students' work (Telli et al., 2008). After 15 years of analysing students' assignments and discussions on effective teachers, as a result of his longitudinal, qualitative, quasi-research study, Walker (2008) concluded that effective teachers had twelve common characteristics. Some of the characteristics were teachers' positive attitudes and high expectations, the cultivation of a sense of belonging and personal relationships. Furthermore, teachers were supposed to be prepared, creative, fair, compassionate, humorous, respectful, forgiving and ready to admit mistakes (Walker, 2008).

More recently, Ferguson (2010) reported on Tripod surveys completed by hundred thousands of elementary, middle and high-school students in the US, Canada and China. The analysis of these Tripod student perceptions assessments resulted in the Seven C's describing teachers' behaviour that contributed to students' learning. According to the Seven C's, an effective teacher had to care, control, clarify, challenge, captivate, confer and consolidate (Ferguson, 2010). In an online survey Delaney et al. (2010) asked students to identify and rank five characteristics of an effective instructor. The analysis of that qualitative study identified the following nine characteristics of an effective teacher: respectful, knowledgeable, approachable, engaging, communicative, organized, responsive, professional and humorous (Delaney et al., 2010). Koutrouba (2012) used a structured questionnaire to study Greek secondary education teachers' views on teaching effectiveness. The characteristics that the teachers defined as attributes of effective teachers were: flexibility, sociability, friendliness, open-mindedness, tactfulness, supportiveness, respect and humour (Koutrouba, 2012). In her 8-year exploratory and qualitative study, Hill (2014) analysed graduate students' perspectives on effectiveness and organized the collected data into the categories of teaching competence, relationship with students and teacher attitudes. Some of the identified characteristics were: knowledge of the subject matter, relevant practice experience, approachability, enthusiasm and interest in students (Hill, 2014).

#### **2.4.2 Research on the characteristics of effective language teachers**

Apart from general research on teacher effectiveness, many studies on effective teaching have also been published in the domain of foreign language education [Brosh (1996), Schulz (1996, 2001), Molica and Nuessel (1997), Pettis (1997), Witcher (2003), Brown (2006), Park and Lee (2006), Arikan et al. (2008), Kourieos and Evripidou (2013)].



Brosh (1996, as cited in Brown, 2006) provided a list of 20 different qualities and asked foreign language teachers and students in Israel to choose the three most important characteristics of an effective foreign language teacher. The students and teachers agreed that the first two were teachers' command of the target language and their ability to transmit knowledge comprehensibly and motivate students. As a third characteristic, the students emphasized the need to be treated fairly, while the teachers wanted to provide their students with successful experiences. In her two separate studies, Schulz (1996, 2001, as cited in Brown, 2006) compared students' and teachers' opinions on grammar teaching and error correction. In both studies she found that the students favoured formal grammar study more than their teachers. That finding emphasized the importance that students attributed to grammar teaching and the need for teachers to discuss language acquisition theories with their students. Pettis (1997) and Mollica and Nuessel (1997) also researched the main traits of competent language teachers. While Pettis (1997, as cited in Shisavan and Sadeghi, 2009) emphasized professional development and language knowledge and skills, in addition to that, Mollica and Nuessel (1997, as cited in Park and Lee, 2006) also mentioned the importance of evaluation, instructional materials and classroom environment. In his study, Witcher (2003, as cited in Taqi et al., 2014) explored the effective characteristics of English teachers and found that the most important ones were enthusiasm, friendliness, open-mindedness, care and respect for students. He placed a special emphasis on enthusiasm and good relationships with students.

More recently Brown (2006) investigated which teacher behaviours students considered to be the characteristics of effective foreign language teachers. The study findings emphasized teachers' knowledge of culture and language, especially the knowledge of grammar and accent. Brown (2006) also pointed out the importance of certain teaching practices such as explaining grammar with real-world context and using real-life materials and information gap activities. Park and Lee (2006) used a questionnaire to investigate the opinions and perceptions of Korean high school language teachers and students. The study focused on the categories of English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills and yielded interesting results. While the teachers emphasised English proficiency, the students ranked pedagogical knowledge as the first characteristic. Socio-affective skills were the least important effective teacher attribute for both groups. The study findings also showed that the students favoured a more learner-centered approach as they emphasised the importance of

arousing students' motivation and self-confidence, listening to students' opinions and adapting teaching to their different proficiency levels and learning styles (Park and Lee, 2006).

Arikan et al. (2008) studied Turkish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' perceptions of an effective English language teacher. The students responded to two open-ended questions about the qualities of an EFL teacher and completed the questionnaire which included the categories of pedagogical skills and personal and professional qualities. Based on the responses, Arikan et al. (2008) found that effective teachers were friendly, young, enthusiastic, creative, humorous, fair, fluent in English, motivating and aware of students' needs. They also liked to play educational games, taught grammar through real-life situations and were open to innovations (Arikan et al., 2008). Kourieos and Evripidou (2013) studied university students' opinions of effective EFL teaching and found that those students also favoured learner-centered approach to language teaching and learning. The students wanted EFL teachers to take into consideration their individual differences, abilities and interests and adapt their teaching to those varying needs. The study findings showed that an effective EFL teacher was supposed to take a more assisting and mediating role in the language teaching and learning process (Kourieos and Evripidou, 2013).

## **2.5 Previous research in Croatia**

Ćurković Kalebić's research (2005, as cited in Shisavan and Sadeghi, 2009) contributed to the development of standards in Foreign Language Teacher preparation in Croatia. The study findings identified fourteen competences that future teachers were supposed to acquire in order to become competent language teachers. Some of the mentioned characteristics valuable for language teachers were: linguistic and communicative competence, communication and presentation skills, knowledge of teaching strategies, methods and theoretical concepts, knowledge about culture and literature, and different abilities like the ability to motivate learners, the ability to deal with unpredictable situations, the ability to create a friendly atmosphere in the classroom and the ability to respond to learners' abilities and needs (Ćurković Kalebić, 2005, as cited in Shisavan and Sadeghi, 2009).

A research which explored primary school learners' perceptions and attitudes towards their English teachers was conducted by Jakominić and Mihaljević Djigunović (2002). The data was collected using a semantic differential scale developed in Canada, but adapted to a

Croatian socio-cultural context. The study findings indicated that some learner variables, such as age, gender and English grade, influenced the way learners perceived their teachers. The authors of the study also concluded that learners' attitudes towards English teachers were neither the cause nor the consequence of the achievement and that the learners could think about the foreign language learning process in a mature and fairly objective way. It is also important to note that the learners found it challenging to evaluate their teachers and showed enthusiasm and interest in the research (Jakominić and Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002).

## **3 The study**

### **3.1 The Aim**

The research aimed at analysing secondary school students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective English teachers. More particularly, the aim was to investigate which teachers' characteristics secondary school students in Croatia found to be representative of and important for effective language teaching practice. The data analysis identified effective teachers' characteristics which were then divided into the categories of subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, socio-affective skills and personality characteristics. The aim was to identify the category considered to be the most important one by the students and to identify the most important characteristics in each category. Finally, students' perceptions were used to construct a profile of an ideal English teacher. The second aim of the research was to study the influence that different student variables such as gender, achievement or the type of secondary school had on students' perceptions of effective teaching.

### **3.2 Sample**

The sample comprised 95 second grade secondary school students selected from two different school types in Croatia and included 57 male students and 38 female students. At the end of the last semester the students' grade point average was 3.44, while the English grade point average was 3.24. The types of schools included were language grammar school and vocational technical school. 53 students attended language grammar school, while 42 students attended vocational technical school. Two classes taught by the same teacher were selected in each school. Among language grammar students, 17 were male and 36 were female. At the end of the last semester their grade point average was 3.79, while the English grade point average was 3.46. Among vocational technical students, 40 were male and only 2 were female. Their grade point average was 3, while the English grade point average was 2.98. The majority of the vocational technical population was male because in Croatia that type of school is considered to be a school for male students, as well as the jobs that they usually get at the end of their studies.

Secondary school students were selected as research participants for several reasons. Firstly, secondary school students have already had enough educational experience in learning

English. During primary school, they have learnt English for eight years and have been exposed to various types of teachers. As a result of that experience, secondary school students have already formed certain beliefs about the language learning process and the effective practices that can make that process easier and more enjoyable. Secondly, at their age, students are already able to make sophisticated judgements, express their opinions and state the expectations they have of the language learning process. Furthermore, secondary school students are expected to show enthusiasm and interest in the kind of research in which they are regarded as important participants and contributors to the language learning process and in which their opinions and beliefs are regarded as meaningful.

The sample included students attending two different types of secondary schools in order to investigate the influence that the school type had on the difference in students' perceptions. Language grammar school was chosen as a school in which English is seen as a highly important subject. In order to graduate from language grammar school and qualify for admission at Croatian universities, secondary school students are required to pass the State Matura exam including exams in three compulsory subjects: the Croatian language, Mathematics and the English language. Therefore, along with their teachers, language grammar school students are dedicated to meeting the State Matura exam requirements and acquiring English in the most effective way. On the other hand, a vocational technical school is a school type where English is seen as a less important subject. The State Matura exam is not obligatory in order to graduate and students are more focused on various vocational subjects. Furthermore, very often vocational technical students find English rather difficult and challenging. What makes it more difficult is its discipline-specific nature which students can find rather challenging at the beginning of their vocational education.

The sample from each school included two second grade classes taught by the same English teacher. Age and teacher were not among the variables whose influence on students' perceptions was investigated, and therefore, these variables were the same for all the study participants in order to exclude their influence.

### **3.3 Procedure and Instruments**

The instrument used in the research was one questionnaire divided into two parts. The first part included three questions asking the students to provide personal information, while the second part included one open-ended question. In the first three questions the students were

asked to provide information on their gender, their grade point average at the end of the last semester and their English grade at the end of the last semester. The open-ended question was: 'In your opinion, which characteristics should an effective English teacher possess?' The students were asked to write short essay responses and to try to be as detailed as possible when describing the desirable qualities of an effective teacher. The questionnaire was anonymous and it was written in Croatian. The students were also asked to write their responses in Croatian in order to avoid the difficulties they might have when writing longer texts and expressing their opinions in English, which would have certainly had a negative effect on the quality of their responses. The goal of using an open-ended question was to get a more detailed description of the qualities of effective teachers. Also, an open-ended question gave the students the possibility to freely identify the characteristics they found important without having their beliefs and opinions influenced by some suggested effective teachers' qualities. In that way, they could voice their views on effective teaching without any influence, providing the possibility of getting a clear insight into secondary school students' beliefs. However, it is important to emphasise that the open-ended nature of the questionnaire also put high demands on the participants as they had to articulate their perceptions clearly without any specific guidelines.

The data was gathered in May 2014 in two secondary schools in Croatia during English classes. The English teacher was not present in the classroom when the students were completing the questionnaire in order to make sure that the students felt free to respond honestly. Before distributing the questionnaire, the students were informed about the purpose of the research and were given short instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire. They were asked to circle their gender, write their grades and then write short essay responses about the characteristics that they thought effective English teachers should possess. Since the questionnaire was anonymous, they were asked to respond honestly and write anything that came into their minds regarding the characteristics of effective teachers. The students were encouraged to ask for any additional explanations that they needed. The time needed to complete the questionnaire was about 20 minutes. The students showed enthusiasm and interest in the research because they felt that their beliefs and perceptions of effective teaching practice were regarded as important and relevant.

The students' short essay responses were subjected to the process of content analysis. They were analysed by noting the frequency of the words (mostly adjectives) and phrases that

the students used when describing effective English teachers. All in all, after the data coding process was completed, 40 different expressions were identified. Those words and phrases were then divided into the categories of subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, socio-affective skills and personality characteristics. Within each category, the characteristics were sorted by frequency in order to identify the most important qualities and the most important category. Furthermore, the influence of variables of age, achievement and school type was analysed. In the end, the results were used to construct the profile of an ideal effective English teacher.

### **3.4 Results**

#### *Subject knowledge*

According to data analysis, various teachers' characteristics concerning the category of subject knowledge were stated 31 times. Those effective teachers' characteristics were divided into four groups in the following order of frequency of occurrence: English language proficiency, vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation and accent and knowledge of culture and customs. Firstly, 'English language proficiency' occurred 23 times in the responses. In most cases, students wanted their teachers to have perfect knowledge of the English language. Apart from that, students mentioned various other qualities related to having a perfect knowledge of English. According to students' opinions, it is required of English teachers to be able to speak English perfectly about any topic that might occur in the classroom. Teachers were not supposed to have any doubts concerning the language which they had to master as if it were their mother tongue. The students stated that they did not want to find themselves in a position where they would have to correct something that the teacher had said. The students also mentioned the importance of a good knowledge of the Croatian language which should be helpful to teachers when translating and explaining grammar. Secondly, 'the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar' was mentioned 4 times. In this case, students put special emphasis on perfect knowledge of English grammar. Thirdly, the importance of having a good pronunciation and accent was cited three times. Finally, only one student wanted an effective English teacher to have knowledge of culture and customs.

### *Pedagogical knowledge*

Within the category of pedagogical knowledge, 13 effective teachers' characteristics were mentioned more often in the students' short essay responses, the total number of their occurrence being 156 times. The first in order of frequency of occurrence was 'being able to explain the subject matter in a clear manner', which was cited 38 times. Regarding that characteristic, several additional explanations were provided. It was thought to be crucial that an effective teacher should not only possess good subject matter knowledge, but also to know how to pass it on to their students, who wanted that knowledge to be passed on in a clear, simple and correct manner by using a lot of examples. The second characteristic was 'teaching tailored to students' proficiency levels', which the students mentioned 26 times. In particular, they mostly emphasised the need for teachers to adapt their teaching to the less successful students, and not to the more successful ones. They wanted effective teachers to dedicate more time to those students and explain the same subject matter to them several times if it be necessary. According to the students' opinions, the less successful students should be given more opportunities to develop their language skills because of the problems they might have with language acquisition due to its specific nature.

Characteristics such as 'having authority' and 'equal and fair assessment and grading' were third and fourth in order of occurrence and were stated 15 and 14 times respectively. When it comes to 'authority', the students wanted their teachers to have authority, to be dominant, to be able to keep discipline in the classroom and not let students make fun of them. Regarding assessment, the students wanted their teachers to be fair when assessing their knowledge and give them the grade that they deserved. The fifth characteristic, stated 12 times, was 'making lessons fun and interesting'. During their English classes, the students wanted to create and organize projects with teachers, learn lessons in a fun way and talk about interesting topics such as London and One Direction. The next characteristic that the students also mentioned 12 times was 'being lenient when grading'. The students wanted their teachers to be especially lenient when giving points on tests, grading their knowledge and deciding whether they would fail the subject or not. Two characteristics were mentioned 7 times: 'using the English language more' and 'focus on grammar'. The students wanted their English teachers to use English throughout the lesson, even when discussing something that was not related to the subject matter being covered. The students thought it would make language acquisition easier, especially concerning the acquisition of new words. Concerning 'focus on



grammar', effective teachers were supposed to explain grammar in a clear manner using a lot of examples. The students considered grammar to be the hardest and the most important aspect of the language and wanted teachers to give more attention to it by doing more grammar exercises in class.

The students also wanted effective teachers to be 'demanding' and that quality occurred 5 times. They wanted their teachers to demand more from them in order to make them invest more effort; otherwise, the students said, they would never do anything by themselves. Also, teachers had to push their students because of the importance that the knowledge of English had for their future employment opportunities. Furthermore, 'creating a working atmosphere' was mentioned 4 times because the students wanted to know that they had to work hard during the lesson. The last three characteristics that the students mentioned 3 times were: 'homework', 'coming on time' and 'real-life topics'. Concerning 'homework', the students wanted it to be assigned every day and they expected their teachers to check if the students had done their homework and then reward or punish them accordingly. Regarding 'real-life topics', the students emphasised that they did not want to be taught only language lessons, but they wanted their teachers to give them advice on everyday issues and leave some time to talk about other topics that the students found relevant.

Apart from the above mentioned qualities, within this category there were 28 other characteristics that the students mentioned only once in their responses. 11 of these characteristics regarded grading and testing, 9 regarded different teaching strategies, and the remaining 8 referred to various aspects of pedagogical knowledge. For example, some students wanted to work in groups, read texts and translate on a daily basis, write essays and prepare more for tests. Furthermore, they wanted their teachers to explain their grades, not exaggerate with written and oral tests and leave their personal problems at home.

### *Socio-affective skills*

Within the category of socio-affective skills, there were 13 different characteristics which appeared 146 times in the students' responses. In order of frequency of occurrence, the first was 'treat students fairly and equally', which was mentioned 26 times. The students wanted effective teachers to treat all students in the same way and not discriminate between them. The students considered it important for teachers not to have favourite students and less favourite ones. Secondly, 20 students expressed a wish that their English teachers be

‘friendly’. Effective teachers had to be friendly and good towards their students, being easy to talk to and having a warm and kind approach to all students. Thirdly, the characteristic of ‘understanding students’ needs’ was stated 18 times. It was important that teachers showed an understanding of students’ difficulties, problems and different situations that might occur in their lives.

Furthermore, the characteristic of ‘making jokes’, was mentioned 13 times. Teachers were supposed to make a joke every once in a while in order to cheer up the students, enhance their learning and strengthen relationships with them. In the fifth and the sixth place, there were two opposing characteristics with the same frequency of occurrence: ‘strict’ and ‘not strict’ towards students. Both characteristics were mentioned 12 times. On the one hand, the students wanted strict teachers who demanded good behaviour and obedience of rules. On the other hand, some students specifically emphasised that they did not want their teachers to be strict. The seventh characteristic that was mentioned 11 times was ‘being helpful’. The students emphasised the importance of teachers’ help regarding both their personal problems and problems with learning the subject matter.

The eighth characteristic in order of frequency was ‘a good relationship with students’, which was mentioned 10 times. In particular, the students emphasised the importance of establishing a good and open relationship between teachers and students with special attention given to the communication between them. The next characteristic, mentioned 8 times, was ‘sparing time for students when they ask for help or for an additional explanation’. It was important that teachers were willing to spare time to help the students because then the students felt free to ask questions without fear of being reprimanded. The tenth characteristic that was mentioned 7 times was ‘being patient and understanding of less successful students’. Teachers were supposed to show special care, patience and attention to students with lower grades. Students particularly expected them to show an understanding of those students who were not talented for learning languages. In the eleventh and twelfth place, two following characteristics were mentioned 3 times: ‘listening to students’ opinions’ and ‘motivating and arousing interest’. The students wanted teachers to be ready to listen when they had something to say or when they wanted to express their opinion. The students also wanted their teachers to encourage them, arouse their interest and motivate them for learning English. Finally, 3 responses showed that the students wanted their teachers to be ‘enthusiastic for teaching’.

### *Personality characteristics*

Within the category of personality characteristics, 10 different characteristics were mentioned in the students' responses with a higher frequency of occurrence. Totally, those characteristics occurred 60 times. Firstly, the characteristic of 'being patient' was stated 17 times. Secondly, the students wanted their teachers to be 'beautiful and nicely dressed', a characteristic occurring 10 times. Thirdly, the characteristic of being 'sociable' was mentioned 7 times. In the fourth place, a wish to have 'a female teacher' was expressed 5 times. Apart from being more interesting, they also thought that female teachers explained the subject matter better than their male colleagues. The next three characteristics, mentioned 4 times, were the characteristics of being 'interesting', 'smart' and 'cheerful'. Finally, 'nice', 'calm' and 'not complicated' were the last three characteristics in this category and they were mentioned 3 times in the students' responses.

In addition to the characteristics stated above, 6 other characteristics were mentioned twice in the students' short essay responses. The students wanted their teachers to be 'young', 'polite', 'good', 'confident', 'tidy' and 'have a charisma'. Finally, several personality characteristics mentioned only once were such as: 'hardworking', 'responsible', 'compassionate', 'loves children' and 'has spent some time in an English speaking country'.

### *School type variable*

Within the category of subject knowledge, there was a significant difference between the students of language grammar school and those of vocational technical secondary school. All the characteristics within this category were regarded as more important by the language grammar school students. Only these students mentioned the importance of knowledge of both pronunciation and accent as well as culture and customs. 16 grammar school and 7 technical school students thought it was important that effective English teachers demonstrated English language proficiency. Regarding the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, 3 grammar school and 1 technical school student specified it in their responses.

Regarding the category of pedagogical knowledge, 10 out of 13 cited characteristics were mentioned more often by the language grammar school students. Only the characteristic of 'coming on time' was mentioned more often by the vocational technical students. Also, the characteristics of 'equal and fair assessment and grading' and 'being lenient when grading' were equally important to both groups. Among 10 characteristics that the grammar school

students found more important, 5 were mentioned only by that group of students. These were: 'having authority', 'focus on grammar', 'demanding', 'creating a working atmosphere' and 'real-life topics'. All in all, the language grammar school students gave more importance to this category.

Within the category of socio-affective skills, 9 out of 13 cited characteristics were mentioned more often by the language grammar students. Only the language grammar students considered the characteristic of being 'enthusiastic for teaching' important. The characteristics of being 'not strict' and 'sparing time for students when they ask for help or for additional explanation' were equally important to both groups. The remaining 2 characteristics that were cited more often by the vocational technical students were: 'listening to students' opinions' and 'being friendly'. On the whole, the language grammar school students gave more importance to this category.

Regarding the category of personality characteristics, the qualities of being 'patient' and 'not complicated' were regarded as more important by the language grammar school students. 15 out of 17 students who specified the importance of being 'patient' were students of language grammar school. The quality of being 'beautiful and nicely dressed' was equally important to both groups. The remaining 7 characteristics belonging to this category were cited more often by vocational technical school students. Generally, the vocational technical school students gave more importance to this category.

#### *Gender variable*

Concerning the participants' gender, within the category of subject knowledge the following three characteristics were considered to be more important by male students: 'English language proficiency', 'knowledge of vocabulary and grammar' and 'knowledge of culture and customs'. The characteristic of 'knowledge of pronunciation and accent' was mentioned more often by female students. Generally, more importance was given to this category by male students.

8 out of 13 different characteristics belonging to the category of pedagogical knowledge were mentioned more frequently by female students. More significant differences regarded the characteristics of 'teaching tailored to students' proficiency levels', 'having authority' and 'focus on grammar'. Also, only female students mentioned the characteristics of 'being demanding' and 'real-life topics'. The characteristic of 'making lessons fun and

interesting' was equally important to both groups, with the remaining four characteristics mentioned more often by male students. The most significant difference regarded the characteristic of 'being lenient when grading', which was mentioned 9 times by male and 3 times by female students. The characteristic of 'coming on time' was cited only by male students. Generally, female students gave more importance to this category.

Within the category of socio-affective skills five characteristics were cited more often by male students and the characteristics of 'being friendly', 'not strict' and 'making jokes' were especially significant. The characteristics of 'treating students fairly and equally', 'understanding students' needs', 'having a good relationship with students' and 'sparing time for them' were equally important to both groups. The remaining four characteristics were cited more often by female students and the most significant difference regarded the characteristic of 'being helpful'. Generally, male students gave more importance to this category.

Finally, considering the category of personality characteristics, six characteristics were specified more often by male students and the most significant ones were 'beautiful and nicely dressed' and 'sociable'. Also, only male students mentioned the characteristic of 'being calm'. The remaining four characteristics were cited more often by female students and the most significant difference regarded the characteristic of 'being patient'. Generally, more importance to this category was given by male students.

#### *Achievement variable*

Regarding their achievement, the students were divided into two groups: the high-achieving students with grades 4 and 5 and the low-achieving students with grades 2 and 3. Within the category of subject knowledge, apart from 'knowledge of culture and customs', all the other characteristics were mentioned more often by the low-achieving students and the most significant one was the characteristic of 'English language proficiency'.

Regarding the category of pedagogical knowledge, six characteristics were cited more often by the low-achieving students and the most significant differences regarded the characteristics of 'explaining in a clear manner', 'equal and fair assessment and grading', 'being lenient', 'focus on grammar' and 'coming on time'. The characteristics of 'teaching tailored to students' proficiency levels' and 'being demanding' were equally important to both groups. The remaining five characteristics were more important to high-achieving students

and the most significant difference regarded the characteristics of ‘using English more’ and ‘creating a working atmosphere’.

Within the category of socio-affective skills, the characteristic of ‘treating students fairly and equally’ was equally important to both groups. Seven characteristics were cited more often by low-achieving students and the most significant difference regarded the characteristic of ‘not being strict’ and ‘making jokes’. The remaining five characteristics were mentioned more often by high-achieving students and the most significant differences regarded the characteristics of ‘sparing time for students when they ask for help or for additional explanation’ and ‘listening to students’ opinions’.

Regarding the category of personality characteristics, the characteristic of ‘being cheerful’ was equally important to both groups. Eight characteristics were cited more often by low-achieving students and the most significant differences regarded the characteristics of being ‘beautiful and nicely dressed’, ‘smart’ and ‘calm’. The only characteristic that the high-achieving students gave more importance to was ‘being female’.

### **3.5 Discussion**

The data analysis has identified numerous characteristics which were organized and divided into the categories of subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, socio-affective skills and personality characteristics. Taking all results into consideration, students gave more importance to the categories of pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills. On the other hand, the categories that were mentioned less often in the students’ short essay responses were the categories of subject knowledge and personality characteristics. The highest importance was attributed to the category of pedagogical knowledge, which included 13 characteristics that were mentioned 156 times. Apart from these, less often the students also mentioned 28 other characteristics, which showed the high interest that they had for that category and how important they considered it to be. Therefore, regarding the characteristics of effective teaching, the participants gave the highest importance to the teaching methods and practices. They wanted their English teachers to present the subject matter in a clear and interesting manner and to adapt it to the students’ individual differences. Furthermore, their teachers had to have authority and grade them fairly and equally. The students cared a lot about these issues and considered them to be characteristic of an effective teaching practice. Apart from pedagogical knowledge, considering the category of socio-affective skills, the

secondary school students thought that effective English teachers had to be friendly, helpful and humorous, understand their needs and treat them all equally. On the other hand, the students cared the least about teachers' personality characteristics. Finally, the fact that the category of subject knowledge was also cited less often than the first two categories might suggest that the participants thought it was normal for an English teacher to have perfect knowledge of English and they did not feel the need to mention it.

Within each category, the characteristics were organized on the basis of frequency of occurrence. On the whole, 40 characteristics were identified within the four categories. When the characteristics only were considered regardless of the category, the first ten characteristics in order of frequency of occurrence were: 'being able to explain the subject matter in a clear manner', 'teaching tailored to students' proficiency levels', 'treat students fairly and equally', 'English language proficiency', 'friendly', 'understanding students' needs', 'patient', 'having authority', 'equal and fair assessment and grading of students' and 'making jokes'. These effective English teachers' characteristics also supported the order presented in the previous paragraph. Four characteristics belonged to the category of pedagogical knowledge; four belonged to the category of socio-affective skills and the remaining two belonged to the categories of subject knowledge and personality characteristics. The order indicated that the secondary school students mostly cared about the way the subject matter was presented. In their opinion, effective English teachers were supposed to know the subject matter and had to be able to pass it on to students in a clear and interesting manner taking into consideration students' proficiency levels. Furthermore, it was important that English teachers were friendly, humorous, and patient and were able to understand students' needs in order to make the students feel relaxed, to motivate them and to form strong relationships with them. However, it was still important that effective teachers had authority and were able to control the class because, in that case, the students were encouraged to study more and work harder. Furthermore, the students emphasised the importance of being treated and graded equally. According to their opinions, the above mentioned qualities were the characteristics of effective English teachers who were supposed to create effective English language classrooms, which should result in effective language acquisition.

Regarding the school type variable, the language grammar students found teachers' subject knowledge to be more important for effective teaching practice than the vocational technical students did. In addition to that, only language grammar students emphasised how

important it was for an effective English teacher to have authority, focus on grammar, create a working atmosphere, be demanding and discuss real-life topics. On the other hand, personality characteristics were more important for vocational technical school students than for language grammar students. These results implied that the language grammar students were more focused on the content of English lessons and on the strategies that would help them acquire that content more effectively. The results were in line with the fact that the language grammar school students were expected to give higher importance to English as a school subject, especially because of the requirements of the State Matura exam.

Concerning the gender variable, male students wanted effective English teachers to have high English language proficiency, to be lenient when grading, to make jokes, not to be strict and to be friendly, sociable, beautiful and nicely dressed. On the other hand, female students regarded as effective those teachers who adapted their teaching to students' proficiency levels, who focused on grammar and discussed real-life topics, who were demanding, helpful and patient and who had authority, but motivated them and aroused their interest. However, it is important to note that the majority of female students attended language grammar school and the majority of male students attended vocational technical school; and therefore sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between the influence of the gender variable and that of the school type variable.

Considering the achievement variable, the low-achieving students emphasised the importance of English language proficiency and equal and fair assessment. They also wanted effective English teachers to explain the subject matter clearly, to focus on grammar, to make jokes, to be lenient when grading and not to be strict. On the other hand, the high-achieving students wanted their English teachers to use the English language more, to create a working atmosphere, to listen to their opinions and to spare time for them when they needed an additional explanation. The results showed that the high-achieving students were confident about following lessons in English and were focused on learning achievement. On the other hand, the low-achieving students were worried about the way English lessons were presented, especially English grammar which was probably one of the language areas they found the most problematic. They also placed a lot of emphasis on lenient grading.

Based on the opinions and perceptions that the second grade language grammar and vocational technical students expressed in their short-essay responses, the profile of an ideal



secondary school English teacher was constructed. In students' opinions, an effective English teacher had to possess a high level of English language proficiency and had to be able to pass that knowledge on to students in a clear, simple, fun and interesting manner by using a lot of examples, teaching interesting lessons and talking about real-life topics that the secondary school students found interesting. They also had to adapt the teaching methods to students' different proficiency levels, especially by taking into consideration the difficulties that the low-achieving students had. It was also important for an effective teacher to treat all students equally and to be fair when grading their knowledge. They had to have authority and control of the class in order to make students work harder and achieve more. An effective English teacher was also supposed to create a positive classroom atmosphere by being friendly, helpful, patient, and humorous and by understanding various students' needs. In that way students felt relaxed in the classroom and were more motivated to participate in the classroom activities.

## 4 Conclusion

Teaching effectiveness is an important educational issue because of the crucial role that teachers play in students' education. As there is still no universal agreement on what effective teaching is, research exploring students' perceptions can bring valuable contributions to the issue in question. The present study examined secondary school students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective English teachers and how those perceptions differed regarding school type, gender and subject achievement. The students expressed their opinions in short-essay responses which were then analysed in order to identify the most important characteristics that the students thought effective English teachers should possess. The students identified numerous characteristics that were divided into the categories of subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, socio-affective skills and personality characteristics. The data analysis showed that the most important characteristics of effective English teachers were pedagogical knowledge and socio-affective skills. The characteristics that the students mentioned with a higher degree of frequency were used to construct the profile of an ideal English teacher. The study findings also revealed that the above mentioned variables had an influence on the students' perceptions. The results of the study are particularly useful to English teachers, although they can provide valuable information to teachers in general. Teachers can use students' perceptions as a starting point for self-reflection and evaluation of their own teaching practice, which should then result in students' greater satisfaction with the learning process. If students are satisfied with the learning environment, they will be more motivated to learn and will, as a result of high motivation, probably obtain better results. Because of all the above mentioned reasons, the question of teaching effectiveness is a question of considerable relevance for the process of second language acquisition.

The present study has some limitations. The study was conducted on 95 second grade secondary school students in two secondary schools and cannot be generalized on the whole secondary school population. Furthermore, during the process of qualitative content analysis the data was coded by one person only, which could have resulted in subjective interpretation. In order to avoid that, it would have been useful to have another person code the data and then compare the results.

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## **Sažetak**

Cilj ovog diplomskog rada bio je istražiti stavove i mišljenja učenika srednjih škola o tome koje bi karakteristike trebao imati kvalitetan nastavnik engleskog jezika. Nadalje, istraženo je kakav utjecaj na mišljenje učenika imaju spol, uspjeh te vrsta škole koju pohađaju. Istraživanje je provedeno u svibnju 2014. godine na 95 učenika i učenica jezične gimnazije i tehničke škole. Sudionicima je postavljeno otvoreno pitanje o karakteristikama kvalitetnog nastavnika engleskog jezika. Analiza njihovih kratkih esejskih odgovora pokazala je da učenici najveću važnost pridaju pedagoškom znanju te afektivnim sposobnostima nastavnika. Osim utjecaja gore navedenih varijabla, predstavljene su i moguće praktične primjene rezultata ovog istraživanja.



