Traits of Effective EFL Teachers: Saudi Students' Perspectives

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Abstract: The aim of the current study is to examine student perceptions of effective EFL teachers using a questionnaire that includes 42 items about teacher attributes. A sample of 237 EFL students (152 females and 85 males) enrolled at a public university in Saudi Arabia were asked to indicate the importance of each attribute. Results showed that students were supportive of the standards of effective EFL teachers. The highest levels of importance of teacher attributes were accorded to the domain of knowledge and credibility, such as knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and to the domain of fairness, which included giving clear grading guidelines. Teaching practices related to being well prepared for each lesson and developing rapport with students were also particularly important for the students. Teachers' personal traits, such as charisma and sense of humor, as well as their use of a variety of teaching methods, were accorded the least importance. Implications for EFL teaching based on the study's findings are discussed.

Keywords: teacher effectiveness evaluation, EFL, Saudi student perceptions, tertiary education

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خصائص معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الفاعلين
من وجهة نظر الطالب السعودي

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جامعة الحدود الشمالية

مستخلص البحث:: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة وجهة نظر الطالب السعودي في خصائص المعلم الفعال في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، باستخدام الاستبيان الذي تتضمن ٤٢ عنصرًا عن خصائص المعلمين. وقد شارك في هذه الاستبانة عدد ٢٣٧ فردًا (١٥٢ طالبة و٨٥ طالب) والمسجلين في إحدى الجامعات السعودية الحكومية، حيث طُلب من كل منهم ترتيب أهمية كل خاصية. وأظهرت النتائج اهتمام الطلاب بمعايير المعلم الفعال للغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وحظيت بأعلى تقييم كل من خاصية إلمام المعلم المعرفي ومصداقيته - كمعرفته بالمفردات والقواعد - وخاصية العدل التي تتضمن قواعد واضحة للتصحيح. ومن ضمن الصفات التي اهتم بها الطلاب بشكل بالغ هي الممارسات التدريسية المرتبطة باستعداد المعلم جيدا لكل محاضرة، وكذلك بناء علاقة جيدة مع الطلاب. وجاءت في ذيل اهتماماتهم صفات الجاذبية الشخصية والحس الفكاهي والتنوع في استخدام الطرق التدريسية. وفي نهاية الدراسة أورد الباحث بعض التطبيقات العملية لتدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية بناء على نتائج الدراسة.

كلمات مفتاحية: تقييم فاعلية المعلم، اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تصورات الطلاب سعودي الجنسية ، التعليم العالي.

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Introduction

There is a consensus among educators that one of the critical elements that contribute to student success is teacher quality (Seidel & Shavelson, 2010; Toropova et al., 2019). However, the debate over which teacher attributes contribute most to student learning is ongoing (Scheerens & Blömeke, 2016). In order to measure teacher quality, researchers have typically focused on qualifications and experience. A number of studies examined the role played by variables such as instructor level of education, educational background, and years of teaching experience on students' performance (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2014; Wayne & Youngs, 2003), particularly on standardized tests (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). Other scholars have asserted that teachers' personal characteristics, such as personality type (Witcher, 2003), "charisma", humor, innovation (Zhang & Watkins, 2007), and confidence (Sotto, 2011), are essential elements for instructor effectiveness (Scheerens, 2016).

Researchers have described instruction as multidimensional (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). Highly qualified instructors are those who possess the ability to provide emotionally supportive environments, deliver appropriate content, and promote critical thinking (Cohen, 2011; Lampert, 2001). Consequently, there appears to be more than one aspect of teacher characteristics that should be considered when measuring teacher effectiveness. In fact, it is particularly important to consider the importance of student perceptions of high-quality teachers. Scholars have argued that instructors should meet students' expectations in the classroom in order to earn students' confidence in their ability to help achieve learning outcomes (Barnes & Lock, 2013). A disconnect between what instructors do in the classroom and what students expect can result in a loss of motivation and effective learning on the part of students (Dörnyei, 2001).

Most research conducted on student perceptions of effective teachers has focused on content areas other than language teaching. Studies have varied, for example, from a focus on math students (Toropova et al., 2019) to business-major students (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Clayson, 2005; Desai et al., 2004). There are significant differences between foreign-language teachers and instructors of other content

areas despite the overlap between attributes of each category of instructors (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015). Borg (2006) asserted that effective foreign-language instructors teach a subject that requires the use of language that differs from the students' first language, establish particular patterns of interaction, and use teaching methods that are intended to set up a learning environment where students communicate while being actively involved in the learning process.

Çelik et al. (2013) pointed out that language instructors are often the sole speakers with whom learners interact as they develop their language skills. Accordingly, students' levels of achievement are dependent on the quality of instruction provided in the classroom. However, providing the necessary support to students may turn out to be a huge burden for teachers who need to possess a host of competencies, including the ability to devise and implement lesson plans according to appropriate standards of language development and to use appropriate assessment methods.

Furthermore, foreign EFL instructors need to show awareness of cultural differences among students (Téllez & Waxman, 2006). As suggested by García and Stritikus (2006), it is important for instructors to develop an understanding of how to pick an appropriate model of teaching that fits a given group of students. In Saudi Arabia, EFL teachers in higher education who are mostly foreigners coming from different corners of the globe face the additional hurdle of not being familiar with the culture of their students. Research has shown that differences in culture can cause students to harbor negative feelings toward their foreign instructors (Li, 2004; Ryan, 1998). Therefore, EFL instructors need to bridge the gap between their cultural background and that of their students. There is enough empirical evidence to suggest that students in some situations tend to harbor mostly negative feelings towards their foreign teachers because they do not share the same culture (Li, 2004). Therefore, EFL instructors need to bridge the gap between their cultural background and that of their students. Brown (2009) claimed that in order to achieve success, instructors need to know their learners' perceptions of effective instruction. Such knowledge would help teachers improve their classroom practice (Barnes & Lock, 2013) and better motivate students (Thompson, 2006). Investigating the qualities of effective instructors is very important and may prove beneficial to both instructors and students

(Metruk, 2021). The purpose of the current study is to examine the characteristics of effective EFL instructors from the perspective of Saudi undergraduate students.

Literature review
Factors influencing students' perceptions of effective teacher attributes

Previous research has indicated that various personal characteristics, such as the instructor's cultural, linguistic, and ethnic background and the learner's gender, explain differences in learners' perceptions of the attributes that characterize effective instructors. Differences in culture have been documented as one cause of students' tendency to hold negative perceptions regarding their foreign teachers (Ryan, 1998; Li, 2004), considering the fact that differences in culture would result in differences in expectations. Hadley and Evans (2001) reported big differences between Japanese students' expectations and their teachers'. Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) found that differences between university students' own cultures in Vietnam and Japan and those of their foreign instructors created tension. However, this does not mean that students should always think that instructors who share the same cultural background or are from their own countries are well suited to be successful teachers.

Furthermore, several studies have indicated that a teacher's linguistic and ethnic background could influence students' perceptions of effectiveness. Borg (2006) argued that some students harbor positive feelings toward instructors who are native speakers of the foreign language they are learning and who are Caucasian (Javier, 2010). Such a preference is widespread in the Arabian Gulf region, where non-native EFL teachers were considered inferior to their native English-speaking peers (Karmani, 2005), based on the assumption that native English-speaking teachers are the ideal model for language production (Braine, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Gender may also affect students' perceptions of the attributes of an effective instructor (Park & Lee, 2006; Zhang & Watkins, 2007). In their study involving EFL students at a secondary school in Taiwan, Chen and Lin (2009) found that male students ranked traits related to ethical behavior and respect for students as the most valued characteristics of a good instructor. Female students valued the importance of establishing

good rapport between instructors and students. They also thought it was important for the instructor to be a motivator.

Attributes of effective EFL teachers

There has been no consensus among scholars regarding the attributes of successful EFL instructors. That is because students around the world who come from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds have different perceptions regarding the qualities of an effective teacher. Some argue that the qualities of good teachers reside in being competent in the target language and culture as well as having the necessary pedagogical skills. Others place more importance on teacher traits, such as their personalities, compassion, and sense of humor (Zhang & Watkins, 2007). In an earlier study, Witcher et al. (2003) compiled a list of attributes of an effective language instructor. They identified three main categories: instructional competence, personality, and the teacher-student relationship. Instructional competence is related to the instructor's ability to create a learner-centered classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Personality refers to teacher traits such as patience and friendliness. In order to maintain a good teacher-student relationship, instructors need to show fairness and compassion.

In his categorization of high-quality teacher attributes, Borg (2006) focused on three domains that are related to the teacher's knowledge of the target language, pedagogical skills, and good attitude toward students. Teachers who possess these attributes should be able to create an enjoyable classroom where students are provided with clear explanations and are offered good pronunciation models. Integrating humor into classroom practice is also identified as an attribute of a good teacher.

Richards (2015) contended that English-language teachers should have not only a sound grounding in pedagogical content knowledge but also in disciplinary content knowledge, which refers to "a circumscribed body of knowledge that is considered by the language-teaching profession to be essential to gaining membership in the profession" (p. 115). Such knowledge could include, for example, second language acquisition, phonology and syntax, and theories of language. Pedagogical content knowledge includes the methods of presenting the subject in a comprehensible way to learners (Toropova et al.,

2019). Having a mix of disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge helps prepare the EFL teacher to understand students' needs, diagnose their learning problems, select and design appropriate learning tasks, and evaluate their learning.

Other researchers have argued that, in order to have a significant long-term impact on their students' learning, EFL teachers need to be aware of and possess certain essential competencies. Al-Seghayer (2017) asserted that successful EFL teachers need to be aware of the cognitive knowledge dimension of language teaching and show profound disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological pedagogical knowledge. They should also possess a high level of English language proficiency and have a particular set of personality traits.

Scholars who examined the attributes of effective English teachers reported a discrepancy between students' and teachers' perceptions of effective teaching. In his small-scale study that involved 17 English language teachers and 17 secondary school students, Badawood (2015) found that, whereas teachers placed higher value on socio-affective skills, students ranked English language proficiency as the most important attribute. In another study, Park and Lee (2006) found that teachers ranked English proficiency as the highest attribute, whereas students ranked pedagogical knowledge as the most important teacher attribute. In the American context, Brown (2009) found that American students preferred a grammar-based approach, whereas their instructors favored a communicative method of teaching.

Students' perceptions of effective teacher attributes

Previous research about attributes that characterize effective EFL instructors indicates that students place high value on knowledge and proficiency in English, teacher rapport, and pedagogical knowledge. Several studies with Korean students indicated that students accord high importance to knowledge of English (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Park & Lee, 2006), which was ranked above teacher rapport. In another study, conducted by Barnes and Lock (2013), Korean students ranked knowledge of English highly, followed by delivery (communication skills and teaching method). Similarly, Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2015) found that students from Omani secondary schools ascribed a high degree of importance to English language proficiency and fair treatment from the teachers. This study, which

involved 233 students and 171 teachers, revealed agreement between students and teachers regarding not only important attributes but also the least important attributes, namely knowledge of Western culture and use of technology in the classroom.

Knowledge of English was also ranked highest among Libyan student teachers. Salem (2019), who gauged the perceptions of 42 Libyan students majoring in English-language teaching at a university in Northern Cyprus, reported the importance of other teacher attributes, namely, delivery, fairness, rapport, organization, and preparation. These results suggest that Libyan student-teachers have the same perceptions about effective teaching as Korean students, as reported by Banes and Lock (2013).

In another study involving Arab EFL students in the United Arab Emirates, Saafin (2005) found that Emiratis expected effective teachers to possess sound classroom practices. According to them, teachers need to demonstrate the ability to create an enjoyable learning environment where students are given ample opportunities to practice their speaking skills. Furthermore, teachers need to be well-versed in teaching methods.

Çelik et al. (2013) reported similar results with EFL students at a Turkish state university. Turkish students tended to favor instructors who possess a number of attributes, which are mainly pedagogical and content knowledge, personality traits, and classroom management skills. Specifically, Turkish students valued teacher fairness, demonstrated the ability to reduce students' anxiety, and displayed enthusiasm while possessing the ability to teach speaking skills and pronunciation well.

Zamani and Angahari (2016) found that teacher rapport was a highly valued attribute among college-level ESL students in Iran. The researchers gauged students' perceptions of effective ESL teachers based on four categories: English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, organization and communication skills, and socio-affective skills. The students thought that the best instructors are those who build a good relationship with students, motivate students, and help build students' confidence in their ability to improve their proficiency in English, especially in reading and speaking.

As demonstrated by the reviewed studies, although there is an overlap regarding the important attributes

that characterize effective EFL instructors, the degree of importance ascribed to high-quality teacher attributes varied between studies given the differences in the context of each study and the measures used to capture teacher attributes. However, an increasing number of researchers (e.g., Barnes & Lock, 2010, 2013, Salem, 2019) have adopted Faranda and Clarke's (2004) taxonomy of effective teacher attributes, which comprises five categories: rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge and credibility, and organization and preparation. Faranda and Clarke (2004) created this model to elicit what attributes business administration students consider most important in their teachers. Table 1 provides a detailed description of each category. The current study is grounded in Faranda and Clarke's framework.

Table 1
Faranda and Clarke's (2004) Categories of Teacher Attributes

Attribute category	Description
Rapport	friendliness, sociability, empathy, accessibility, receptiveness, attitude
Delivery	personal style, communication, pedagogy
Fairness	grading, impartiality, examination relevance, transparency, workload
Knowledge and Credibility	content knowledge, competence (skills), experience
Organization and Preparation	syllabus quality, clarity, and adherence; lesson preparation

Variables affecting students' perception of effective teacher attributes

The factors that may influence students' perceptions of the attributes of an effective FL teacher include gender and educational level. There has been no consensus among scholars on whether gender plays a role in shaping students' perceptions of teaching effectiveness. Some scholars reported differences between male and female students in terms of their perceptions of the teaching traits they find important (e.g., Chen & Lin, 2009; Metruk, 2021; Park & Lee, 2006). For example, in a study that aimed at examining the characteristics of effective EFL teachers from the perspective of Korean students, Park and Lee (2006) reported that the characteristics that males rated higher than females included the socio-affective skills category. Females, on the other hand, rated pronunciation proficiency and fairness higher than their male peers. In the Taiwanese context, Chen and Lin (2009) reported that the teaching-related traits that females rated higher than males were personality and teacher-student relationship, ability to motivate students to learn English, and familiarity with the English culture. Conversely, the traits that males rated higher than females were respecting students and being ethical. In a more recent study with Slovak EFL university students, Metruk (2021) found that female and male students agreed on the characteristics of an effective language teacher.

Other studies provided have evidence that suggests that female and male students do not have different perceptions of important traits of effective instructors (see, e.g., Al-Maqtri & Ahmad, 2013; AlTameemy, 2019; Zadeh, 2016; Zamani & Ahangari, 2015), even though these studies took place in different educational settings.

The role of educational level in shaping students' perceptions of the prominent traits that should be found in an effective FL teacher has received very little attention from researchers. The one relevant study that examined effective English teacher characteristics from the perspective of students was conducted in Thailand (Chumworatayee, 2021). The researcher compared the responses of 125 undergraduate and graduate students using Barnes & Lock's (2013) questionnaire. Results did not show a significant difference between the two groups in the five attribute categories. However, the categories of knowledge, credibility, and fairness were ranked differently.

The current study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how various groups of language learners in a particular educational and sociocultural context view an effective language teacher. The more we learn about the characteristics of effective language teachers, the more effective language teacher preparation models will be (Brosh, 1996).

Saudi university students' specific expectations for their EFL instructors are an under-researched area. There is a paucity of research regarding how EFL students characterize effective EFL instructors in the classroom. This study was designed to examine Saudi university students' opinions regarding what attributes are most important in a good EFL teacher. The focus was on the five following attributes: rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge and credibility, organization, and preparation. The current study's findings may be beneficial to teachers, who should be aware of different expectations from different levels of students (Chumworatayee, 2021). Based on the research outcomes, the study could offer practical suggestions for teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia or similar educational contexts.

The following research questions were addressed in the current study:

What do Saudi EFL students consider the most and least important attributes of an effective EFL instructor: rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge and credibility, or organization and preparation?

Is there a significant difference in students' perceptions regarding the most important attributes of an effective EFL instructor in terms of students' gender and educational level?

English teacher situation at Saudi universities

Teaching staff at Saudi universities come from different countries with different educational and training backgrounds. Some teachers who hold doctoral degrees in specific areas of English, such as literature or linguistics, have never received any training in pedagogy or classroom management. Although they may be experts in their areas of expertise, they may not be able to create a classroom environment where students are given ample opportunities to achieve their learning goals. Professional development opportunities that focus on training specifically designed to ensure high-quality teaching for EFL students are limited. As many universities strive to get national accreditation, ensuring high-quality teaching for students becomes a requirement. Hence comes the need to gauge students' opinions regarding what variables are most important to a good EFL instructor. The outcomes of this study will inform instructors about students' expectations and invite them to reflect on their classroom instruction.

Method

Participants

A group of 237 EFL Saudi students (152 females and 85 males) majoring in English at a public university in Saudi Arabia participated in the study. Their ages ranged between 18 and 23 ($M = 21.83$, $SD = 1.23$). About 24.1% were freshmen, 13.9% sophomores, 16.9% juniors, and 45.1 % seniors.

Instrument

A questionnaire was used to measure student perceptions of EFL teaching quality. The first part of the questionnaire contained questions that elicited participants' age, gender, and educational level (first year, second year, third year, and fourth year). The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 42 items measuring five domains, comprising rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge and credibility, and organization and preparation (Faranda & Clarke, 2004). An adapted version of the questionnaire by Barnes and Lock (2010) was used to obtain students' perceptions regarding the attributes of effective EFL teachers. The participants were instructed to rate the individual traits that might be regarded as contributing to good teaching. The scale had very good internal reliability (coefficient alpha =.971). The item response was given on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), to 5 (strongly agree). The survey was translated into Arabic with the help of a professor who is specialized in English-to-Arabic translation. Then a second professor, who is a native speaker of Arabic, back translated that version to English. The back translation was checked against the original English version to ensure the meaning of the survey items remained intact. The Arabic version of the instrument was used in this research because

students feel more comfortable answering surveys in their native language.

Data collection and analysis

Prior to administering the questionnaire, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Northern Border University. Prospective participants were briefed about the purpose of the study. Students gave their consent before the start of the questionnaire. A link to a Google form containing the survey was made available to students. It took about 15 minutes to answer the survey questions. Data collection was conducted in the spring semester of 2020. Analyses were performed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and discussion

The first research question examined the most important and least important attributes of an effective EFL instructor. In general, the findings reveal that Saudi students ascribe importance to all the characteristics that effective EFL instructors should possess. The participants considered all five teacher attributes important. However, a closer look at the means (see Table 2) shows that knowledge of English was ranked as the most important category with a mean of 4.10. Similar results were reported by Park and Lee (2006), who found that Korean high school EFL students rank knowledge of English above other attributes such as rapport. The results were in line with the findings reported by studies involving Arab EFL students in the Lybian context (Salem, 2019) and the Omani context (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015).

Rapport and delivery were clearly considered important categories, but their level of importance is not consistent with previous studies. Korean EFL students, for example, nominated delivery as the most important attribute that English language teachers should possess (Barnes & Lock, 2013). Chumworatayee (2021) reported that Thai students ranked rapport as the most important attribute.

Table 2

Overall rankings of the Attribute Categories

Overall Ranking	Attribute Category	M	SD
1	Knowledge and Credibility (Knowledge of English)	4.10	.79
2	Fairness	4.05	.72
3	Organization and Preparation	3.91	.78
4	Delivery (Communication skill and teaching method)	3.90	.68
5	Rapport (Relationship with students)	3.89	.70

Knowledge and credibility

Knowledge and credibility category received the highest mean among the five attribute categories with a mean of 4.10. The three knowledge and credibility attributes all scored highly (see Table 3). Item 36 (have a good knowledge of vocabulary) returned the highest mean score (4.15), followed by "have a good knowledge of grammar" (Item 35), which returned a mean score of 4.13. Students' belief that knowledge of grammar is more important than teaching qualifications reflects the common belief among language learners in the Arab world that qualified teachers are those who are well-versed in grammar. The same findings are echoed in Salem's (2019) study in the Libyan context. The high ranking given to knowledge of the target language was also advocated by Korean EFL students (Barnes & Lock, 2013).

Table 3
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Knowledge and Credibility Items

Item Number and Description	*M*	*SD*
34. are well qualified for FL teaching	4.02	.98
35. have a good knowledge of grammar	4.13	.86
36. have a good knowledge of vocabulary	4.15	.81

Fairness

Fairness was selected as the second-most important category. Analysis of the data revealed that fairness attributes were viewed positively (see Table 4). Participants agreed that instructors should provide clear grading guidelines (M = 4.22), which is the most highly rated item among all five teacher attributes category items. It is worth noting that opinions about the importance of preparing students for examinations were not ranked as high (M = 3.84). However, support for classwork (M = 4.20) and homework (M = 4.11) were highly valued by participants. It is rather surprising that dealing with students fairly was not particularly important for students, which was not the case for Korean students who felt that their English instructors tended to treat advanced students better (Barnes & Lock, 2013). In the Libyan context, teacher fairness was the most highly valued attribute by the students, with a mean score of 6.7 (Salem, 2019).

Table 4
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Fairness Items

Item Number and Description	*M*	*SD*
29. treat all students fairly	3.89	1.02
30. prepare students well for examinations	3.84	1.07
31. give students clear grading guidelines	4.22	.89
32. require students to work hard during class	4.20	.79
33. require students to do homework	4.11	.84

Organization and Preparation

The mean scores for fairness attributes were positive overall (see Table 5). Participants supported the attribute of instructor preparation. The mean response was the highest of all the six attributes related to organization and preparation (M = 4.10).
According to the mean scores, students considered following the syllabus to be important, whereas Korean students did not (Barnes & Lock, 2013). However, of the six attributes, providing a syllabus detailing course content for each week (Item 38) was the weakest. Getting an idea about the lesson objectives and receiving explanations of the teaching methods (Item 39) were not considered particularly important by participants. This is rather a surprising outcome since students in other contexts (e.g., South Korea) tend to appreciate the availability of information about the syllabus. Such information could better prepare them for lessons. Similarly, participants believed that information about instructional methods and objectives helped them get a better understanding of the purpose of delivered content (Barnes & Lock, 2010). In addition, respondents did not strongly support the idea of teachers making their own supplemental material (Item 42), which suggests that students wanted the instructor to stick to the textbook. This could be attributable to the fact that students were afraid that supplementary materials could make their study workload heavier.

Table 5
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Organization and Preparation Items

Item Number and Description	*M*	*SD*
37. are well prepared every lesson	4.10	.84
38. provide a syllabus detailing course content week by week	3.74	1.10
39. explain the instructional methods to the class	3.90	.99
40. tell students the lesson objectives each lesson	3.86	1.05
41. stick to the syllabus	4.07	.87
42. make their own supplemental material.	3.82	.94

Delivery

Students' responses to delivery attributes are reported in Table 5. The mean responses helped to clarify participants' perceptions about a number of teaching approaches and styles.

Of the 17 items related to the questionnaire category "Delivery", students thought that the most important attributes were that English instructors should be engaged in error correction, specifically to "correct writing errors" (M = 4.09) and "correct speaking errors" (M = 4.06). Teaching grammar (Item 19) was also considered an important attribute.

The data provided useful information about teacher-student patterns of communication. Participants generally agreed that teachers should "encourage student participation in class" (Item 21), with mean scores of 3.91. This finding was corroborated by previous studies (e.g., Barnes & Lock, 2010; Park & Lee, 2006). However, they believed that teachers should "ask questions, then wait for volunteers to answer" (Item 26) and "give students plenty of time to answer questions" (Item 28), with mean scores of 3.91 and 3.81, respectively. This reflects a common complaint among FL learners that instructors tend to not wait long enough for

responses to their questions (Barnes & Lock, 2013). Furthermore, respondents expected teachers to "use good examples" (Item 14) and "use easy words" (Item 24), with mean scores of 3.92 and 3.87, respectively. The same views were shared by Korean EFL students (Barnes & Lock, 2013).

Students expected their English instructors to "use Arabic (L1) selectively" (Item 16), with mean scores of 3.70. Similar results were reported in previous studies (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Lai, 2009).

It is interesting that participants did not believe in the great importance of teacher enthusiasm (Item 12), as it was the tenth highest mean score in the delivery category with a mean score of 3.78. This outcome is inconsistent with previous studies (Barnes & Lock, 2013; Desai et al., 2001; Faranda & Clarke, 2004).

Finally, the data showed the lack of importance students gave to the instructor's "use of a variety of teaching methods" (Item 15), which was the lowest mean score in the delivery category with a mean score of 3.50. This could be attributable to the fact that students may not be aware of the importance of using various teaching methods. They may think that this could be important to the instructor himself.

Table 6.
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Delivery Items

Item Number and Description	M	SD
12. are enthusiastic about teaching	3.78	1.00
13. give clear explanations	3.69	.99
14. use good examples	3.92	.84
15. use a variety of teaching methods	3.50	1.11
16. use Arabic (L1) selectively	3.70	.99
17. correct writing errors	4.09	.79
18. correct speaking errors	4.06	.91
19. teach grammar	4.04	.85
20. use group work	3.78	1.06
21. encourage student participation in class	3.91	1.03
22. encourage participation of students with low confidence	3.68	1.16
23. talk slowly in the target language	3.65	1.05
24. use easy words	3.87	.92
25. ask questions frequently	3.78	.94
26. ask questions then wait for volunteers to answer	3.91	.90
27. ask individual students to answer questions	3.70	.95
28. give students plenty of time to answer questions	3.81	1.02

Rapport

Attributes associated with "rapport" (M = 3.89) that were considered important by respondents were related friendliness, patience, receptiveness, and openness to students, all of which scored 4 or above. Further, students thought that qualified instructors should "have a positive attitude in general" (M = 3.97), "develop good relationships with students" (M = 3.92), and "care about students" (M = 3.95). The same level of importance was also given by Omani students to attributes related to affective variables (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2015). The authors reported that Omani students rated highly the attribute related to instructor care about students "having good rapport with pupils", with a mean score of 3.51. Similarly, in the Qatari context, Sabbah (2018) reported that ESL students rated teacher friendliness as the highest attribute (M = 4.96), while other related attributes such as kindness and patience had mean scores of 4.85 and 4.73, respectively. In a more recent study, Salem (2019) found that attributes that were awarded the highest level of importance were related to caring about students (M = 6.3), listening to students (M = 6.1), having positive attitudes towards them, patience (M = 5.9), and friendliness (M = 5.9). These outcomes provide further evidence for the argument that foreign language learners value attributes that help alleviate levels of anxiety (Barnes & Lock, 2010). Participants in the current study thought that developing personal relationships was the most important attribute among rapport items. Similar findings were reported by previous studies (e.g., Faranda & Clarke, 2004; Thompson, 2006).

Table 7
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Rapport Items

Item Number and Description	M	SD
1. are friendly	4.12	.80
2. develop good relationships with students	3.92	.90
3. share personal experiences	4.00	.86
4. care about students	3.95	.92
5. are patient	4.00	.97
6. listen to students	4.04	.92
7. have a positive attitude in general	3.97	.90
8. have charisma	3.53	1.02
9. understand the student's English education background	3.84	1.01
10. understand the different student levels	3.85	1.03
11. have a sense of humor	3.59	1.06

The third research question explored the potential difference in students' perceptions regarding the most important attributes of an effective EFL instructor in terms of gender and educational level. Multiple independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine the differences between male and female students' perceptions regarding the most important attributes of an effective EFL instructor. As shown in Table 7, there was a significant difference in rapport between males (M = 4.1, SD =.67) and females (M = 3.77, SD =.70), t(235) = 3.65, p < .001, d =.49, as well as a significant difference in delivery between males (M = 4.1, SD =.70) and females (M = 3.79, SD =.64), t(235) = 3.23, p < .005, d =.41. In addition, there was a significant difference in fairness between males (M = 4.2, SD =.71) and females (M = 3.95, SD =.71), t(235) = 2.93, p < .005, d =.39,

as well as a significant difference in fairness (M = 4.2, SD =.71) than for the female participants (M = 3.95, SD =.71), t(235) = 2.93, p < .005, d =.39. However, in terms of the trait of organization, there was no significant effect for gender, t(235) = 1.76, p =.080, d = .19 despite males (M = 4.0, SD =.79) attaining higher scores than females (M = 3.84, SD =.77).

These results suggest there are specific traits that are more important for females and other specific traits that are more important for males. The outcomes of this study corroborate the findings reported by other scholars who provided evidence that there are differences between male and female students in terms of their perceptions of the teaching traits they find important (Chen & Lin, 2009; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011; Metruk, 2021; Park & Lee, 2006).

Table 8
t-test Results Comparing Males and Females on Attribute Categories

	Males		Females		t(235)	P	Cohen's d	η^2
Attribute category	M	SD	M	SD				
Rapport	4.1	.67	3 .77	.70	3.65	.001	.49	.24
Delivery	4.1	.70	3.79	.64	3.23	.002	.41	.20
Fairness	4.2	.71	3.95	.71	2.93	.004	.39	.19
Knowledge	4.3	.76	3.98	.79	3.11	.002	.43	.20
Organization	4.0	.79	3.84	.77	1.76	.08	.19	.09

To measure any potential difference between students' perceptions regarding the most important attributes of an effective EFL instructor in terms of educational level, five univariate ANOVAs were conducted to examine the differences between responses of students based on the educational level (first, second, third, and fourth years) in terms of rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge, and organization (dependent variables). As shown in Table 8, the results indicated that the four groups (first, second, third, and fourth years) differed significantly in rapport, delivery, and fairness. Post hoc comparisons using Boenferroni's test indicated that the Rapport mean score for second-year students (M = 4.14, SD =.58) was significantly different than that for fourth-year students (M = 3.78, SD =.65). The univariate ANOVA yielded a statistically significant effect, F(3, 233) = 3.86, p = .010, η2 =.047. It did not significantly differ from the first year (M = 4.05, SD =.68) or the third year (M = 3.75, SD =.87). This suggests that fourth-year students perceived Rapport attribute as the least important compared with their peers from different years of study. In addition, Post hoc comparisons showed that the delivery mean score of second-year students (M = 4.21, SD =.58) was significantly higher than that of third-year students (M = 3.78, SD =.80) and fourth-year students (M = 3.76, SD =.58). The univariate ANOVA yielded a statistically

significant effect, F(3, 233) = 5.25, p =.002, η2 =.063. It did not significantly differ from the first year (M = 4.03, SD =.73). This result implies that third- and fourth-year students gave the same importance to the attribute of delivery as first- and second-year students. Similarly, the fairness mean score for second-year students (M = 4.36, SD =.58) was significantly higher for third-year students (M = 3.88, SD =.86) and fourth-year students (M = 3.92, SD =.64). The univariate ANOVA yielded a statistically significant effect, F(3, 233) = 5.17, p =.002, η2 =.062. It did not significantly differ from the first year (M = 4.22, SD =.77). These findings suggest that first- and second-year students give more importance to the attribute "fairness" than third- and fourth-year students. Regarding the attributes of knowledge and organization, there was no significant difference between students' perceptions, regardless of their educational level. These findings are not aligned with Chumworatayee's (2021) results, which reported that students' rankings of effective EFL teacher attributes were the same regardless of their educational level. However, such a comparison has to be taken with caution since Chumworatayee's (2021) sample included undergraduate and graduate students, while the current study included only undergraduate students from different years of study (freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior years).

Table 9

Means Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Analysis of Variance in Dimensions

	First Year (N = 57)		Second Year (N = 33)		Third (N = 40)		Fourth Year (N = 107)		F(3,233)	p-value	η2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Rapport	4.05	.68	4.14	.58	3.75	.87	3.78	.65	3.86	.010	.047
Delivery	4.03	.73	4.21	.58	3.78	.80	3.76	.58	5.25	.002	.063
Fairness	4.22	.77	4.36	.58	3.88	.86	3.92	.64	5.17	.002	.062
Knowledge	4.11	.85	4.33	.59	3.97	.91	4.07	.76	1.37	.251	.017
Organiza-tion	3.98	.84	4.16	.57	3.88	.83	3.81	.78	1.87	.136	.023

Implications

The findings reported in this study have some implications for preservice teachers and practitioners in FL instruction. The importance that Saudi students placed on EFL teachers' knowledge and credibility suggests that teachers in similar contexts may need to demonstrate their competence and command of the target language in order to reassure learners of their ability to teach them.

Teacher preparation was highly valued among participants. A well-prepared instructor engages students in learning through careful planning. Each lesson has to have goals. Each stage of the lesson has to be planned and timed. Such planning helps the instructor maintain a standard teaching pattern and avoid deviations from the syllabus. Students expect their instructors to stick to the syllabus. Instructors who take part in formal professional development or collaborative activities will be better prepared for various classroom requirements and will witness an improvement in their performance.

Saudi students who participated in the study placed importance on friendly and patient EFL teachers who develop good relationships with students. Therefore, instructors need to create a safe learning environment that boosts students' motivation to learn. MacIntyre et al. (2019) argued that the promotion of the well-being of learners is a major contributor to the learning process. Such an endeavor includes increasing students' motivation, interest, and enjoyment and decreasing anxiety. As Horwitz (2017) pointed out, "there will be no magical treatments to help anxious learners. In most cases, the straightforward approaches of teacher support and an encouraging environment will remain the best options" (p. 42). Creating a positive learning environment where students enjoy instruction may reduce anxiety levels and enhance language learning. One implication for FL instructors is to develop enjoyable activities, not just focus on reducing anxiety (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017). Teachers should help students have the most positive language learning experience possible (MacIntyre et al., 2019). In the same vein, Shao et al. (2019) stressed the crucial role that positive emotions play in increasing language learners' motivation and performance. They suggest that foreign-language teachers should focus on enhancing students' enjoyment.

Conclusion and potential future research

The aim of the current study was to examine the desirable traits of effective EFL instructors in a tertiary-level context as perceived by Saudi students. The highest levels of importance among the five categories of teacher attributes were awarded to two dimensions: knowledge and credibility, such as knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and fairness, which included giving clear grading guidelines. Teaching practices related to being well prepared for each lesson and developing rapport with students were particularly important for Saudi students. Participants in the current study did not attribute importance to the teacher's charisma or sense of humor. Similarly, they did not think that using a variety of teaching methods was important.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the current study. First, this study was conducted using samples drawn from a single university. It would be necessary to extend the research to other Saudi universities in order to generalize the findings of the study. Further, the present study did not account for important variables that may have influenced students' perceptions, such as proficiency level. Low achievers and high achievers may have different perceptions of what teacher attributes are most important. No permission was granted to interview students. Therefore, the absence of qualitative data has made it difficult to have a complete picture of a high-quality EFL instructor as perceived by Saudi students at the university level. In addition, the study was based only on student opinions. It would be worthwhile to examine teachers' perceptions of the attributes of effective teaching. Of particular interest would be an examination of whether EFL instructors are aware of their students' expectations regarding teaching practices and whether they are actively trying to meet those expectations.

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