

## Excellent Teachers' Perspective on Crucial Qualities in Being Effective Teachers in Managing the Classroom

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**Abstract:** The study explores the Excellent Teachers' perspectives on the crucial qualities necessary in becoming effective teachers. Excellent Teachers or "Guru Cemerlang" in this study are teachers who earned their title as "Guru Cemerlang", based on promotional basis, due to their expertise in their teaching areas, exhibition of exceptional qualities in their personality and leadership and accumulation of vast teaching experiences. This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews and email interviews as its data collection method. The interviews were conducted on nine (9) Malay Muslim Excellent Teachers; seven (7) females and two (2) males from nine different schools of nine different school districts in Selangor. Their age ranges from thirty seven (37) to fifty three (53) years with teaching experiences ranging from ten (10) to thirty one (31) years. The result of the study revealed two (2) main categories of crucial qualities deemed necessary in becoming effective teachers and effective classroom managers which are teachers' awareness and teachers' disposition. Teachers' awareness is characterized by teachers' responsibilities and teachers' faith. Teachers' responsibilities are depicted in terms of teachers' commitment and responsibilities in teaching. Meanwhile teachers' faith is described as teachers' awareness regarding their job in relation to religion. Another part of the main category is teachers' disposition characterized by bold, compassionate and dynamic.

**Key words:** Teacher qualities • Classroom management • Effective teachers • Excellent teacher

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### INTRODUCTION

Teachers assume a heavy responsibility and their practical roles extend beyond the definition of teaching. Teachers are expected to assist students in their cognitive and affective development [1] and to educate students in the socialization process so that the students would be able to be successful in life and function effectively in society [2]. Teachers are now facing students who are more exposed to various values learnt from peers and the technology such as the television and smart phones as compared to twenty years ago. In addition, there are students who hail from home environments that are not adequately conducive to the development of social skills and for behaving correctly in school [3]. Reports show that misbehaviour is increasing in secondary schools [4]. [5] stated that students learning process in the classroom is directly correlated with teachers' classroom management ability and teachers' actions in the classroom have a double effect on students achievements as compared to curriculum policy. Similarly, recent

research has shown that effective classroom strategies that encourage effective environment can affect students ability to achieve academically [1]. In becoming an effective teacher, it is more difficult and complicated as compared to what many people have thought [6]. This study is therefore carried out to investigate Excellent Teachers' beliefs of the important elements possessed by teachers in becoming effective managers in managing students in the classroom. This study hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge that addresses teachers' qualities in Malaysian secondary schools. The ability to manage the classroom is crucial in order to bring about effective teaching and learning environments both for teachers and students.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted the qualitative research approach through a basic interpretive qualitative study [7]. Semi-structured in-depth interviews of Excellent teachers was the primary source of research instrument in

this study. This research focuses on “Guru Cemerlang” or Excellent Teachers (ET) who teach in secondary schools in the state of Selangor. In this study, “Guru Cemerlang” (Excellent Teachers) are teachers who received the title “Guru Cemerlang” due to promotional exercise. These are teachers who are deemed experts in their teaching practices and have shown high qualities in their personality and leadership as well as having a vast teaching experience (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, Guru Cemerlang, Borang Permohonan Guru Cemerlang, n.d). The participants of this study consist of nine (9) Excellent Teachers (ET), age ranging from 38 to 54 years old, with vast work experience ranging from 10 to 31 years and all are Malay and Muslim teachers who taught in schools located in nine different school districts in Selangor. Pseudonyms were given to all participants; (GC1 to GC9). Two (2) were male teachers and seven (7) were female teachers, which is considered reasonable since the majority of ETs and school teachers are females. Most of the selected ETs have been appointed as “Guru Cemerlang” (Excellent Teacher) for about four years except for GC6 with seven years tenure. Most of the ETs graduated with a first degree except for two ETs with Master’s degree. They specialised in specific disciplines in the secondary school. Member checks and peer examination were conducted for trustworthiness. The transcripts of the interviews were transcribed and coded. An analysis using constant comparison method was employed which utilised the open coding and axial coding to arrive at the themes.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Excellent Teachers’ perspectives are representations of what Excellent Teachers believe are the necessary elements possessed by teachers in becoming effective managers in disciplining their students. The result portrays Excellent Teachers’ perspectives which encompass teachers’ awareness and teachers’ disposition.

Teachers’ awareness is characterized by teachers’ responsibilities and teachers’ faith. Teachers’ responsibilities are pertaining to the realization that teachers have commitments and responsibilities that they must fulfil efficiently. Meanwhile teachers’ faith refers to the awareness that teachers have regarding their job in relation to religion, namely that teachers have faith that Allah determines everything in ones’ life.

Teachers’ disposition is characterized by bold, compassionate and dynamic teachers. Disposition in this context pertains to the character or personality that effective teachers should possess. Bold refers to teachers being fearless and being confident in attending to various situations especially from students’ and their family. Compassionate refers to the need of teachers to have certain qualities such as empathy, care and patience in managing their students. Dynamic refers to teachers who are full of life, energetic and have creative ideas in the classroom.

- Teacher awareness. Teacher awareness refers to the realization that the career as a teacher comes with many responsibilities especially in the journey of teaching and educating the students who will be the future leaders. This theme is characterized by ‘responsibilities’ and ‘faith.’

**‘Responsibilities’:** The concept of ‘*responsibilities*’ is concerned with the many responsibilities that a teacher shoulders and the need to fulfil the responsibilities efficiently. As indicated by GC6, teachers must be aware that being a teacher is not simply to think about it as a mere profession, but it is a responsibility that the teacher needs to shoulder to teach and also to educate the students not only about their studies but also concerning personal matters. Meanwhile, GC1 mentioned that teachers are role models for their students. Therefore, having good personal qualities are deemed important and the teacher is responsible to portray these good qualities consistently. By doing so, students will respect their teachers and take them as their role models. Teachers’ responsibilities are not simply to teach and educate but teachers must be sensitive towards the students feeling. GC4 stressed that teachers must be able to address the students’ academic performance as well as their emotions. “*Because dealing with students, you have to be holistic with them. It’s not only academic right? You have to go into what they feel.*” (GC4). Teachers may have to start planning what they want to teach and expected student behaviour even before coming to school. GC2 pointed out the importance of being well prepared coming to class to teach the students. Teachers who are not well-prepared to teach would indicate the non-professionalism and irresponsible attitude. In addition, sometimes students would consult teachers regarding their academic or personal matters. GC4 expressed that it is very important

that teachers refrain from talking about students' personal matters to other teachers and discussions between a student and the teacher should remain confidential. *"It's private and confidential and it stays that way. That's why people come to me"* (GC4). GC1 emphasized that teachers need to make a lot of sacrifices for the benefits of the students such as to learn the students' mother tongue, buy stationaries and spend extra hours to teach the students. The majority of ETs believe that teachers need to manage their own students' discipline except for some serious cases, only then the students should be referred to the school's administration. According to GC1, she used her own method to handle student discipline matters and has been successful in doing so. GC3 said, discipline cases need to be solved by the teacher with the exception of very serious cases. If the regular cases were brought into the principal's knowledge, that would only indicate the teachers' incapability in handling their students. Students in the class come from different backgrounds. In normal cases, there were students who were disinterested coming to school and create problems in the classrooms. Therefore, according to GC3, teachers must realize the issues at hand and be prepared to receive students with discipline problems and not to ignore them. *"we have to be ready to receive students like this...with discipline problems"* (GC2). Students, regardless of their behaviour, should be valued and be treated humanely according to GC6.

**'Faith':** Teachers' faith refers to the awareness that teachers have regarding their job in relation to religion, namely that teachers have faith that Allah (God) determines everything in one's life. Regardless of the heavy responsibilities and commitment in the teaching profession, excellent teachers are aware that teaching is a noble job; a profession that may benefit not only the teacher and the students, but also the teachers' family. GC4 said, she wanted to make sure that the salary that she receives is blessed by the Almighty God, Allah. When the salary and life are blessed, the outcome would be a life full of barakah and prosperity for her and the family. *"I must make sure that whatever I'm paid for is worth it, worth and "berkatlah", bless lah."* (GC4). Comparing the amount of work and tasks that teachers perform, the salary they receive, is not equitable. According to GC7, if a teacher keeps comparing her salary to her workload, the teacher would not care about the students' wellbeings and their education. However, she said, a teacher took up

the workload, because she/he did it solely for Allah. Another important thing that a teacher should be aware of is that Allah the Almighty determines everything in our life. GC1 said every teacher must hold the belief that teachers must exert all effort in helping out the students and make 'doa' (prayer) to Allah. It is important that teachers believe that Allah determines the success of their deeds. GC6 said, teachers must be confident that anything is possible through effort. *"But we have to instill our confidence in Him (GC6)*. GC1 further asserted, teachers should be pleased with Allah's will because Allah has His own plan for the teacher and the student. *"Allah best knows the secrets of humans. God has His own plans so we have to be content. Never ever scold students; "why are you so rude...! don't ever say that"* (GC1). Teaching is a very noble job and the reward of carrying the responsibilities faithfully and sincerely would be awarded by God in many ways. One of the results of being a sincere teacher is that the student would change for the better. GC6 said, the principle that she embraced was in being sincere in her job to educate the students because educating the students is a trust.

To sum up, teachers' awareness is concerned with the recognition of the great tasks that Excellent Teachers shoulder. The awareness includes the Excellent Teachers' responsibilities as a teacher in educating the students and the faith that they have in their job in relation to religion.

Teachers' disposition . The theme teachers' disposition refers to the character or personality that effective teachers should possess. Teacher disposition was formed under three themes, namely 'bold', 'compassionate' and 'dynamic'.

**'Bold':** Teachers need to be brave and confident because they have to attend to various students from many different backgrounds, even with some students joining gangs. Excellent Teachers make decisions with confidence. In dealing with students, teachers need to be strict in getting the teaching and learning objectives achieved. According to GC5, teachers must know when to be strict because it is unwise to be strict all the time because students tend to be afraid and detest the teacher. It is good if the teacher is strict but remains approachable.

**'Compassionate':** Excellent Teachers care for students' mental, physical and emotional well-beings. Being compassionate towards students is an important factor in disciplining students. One of the criteria in being

compassionate is that Excellent Teachers showed that they care for their students' well-being. GC6 said she cares for her students like her own children. GC8 said she would have small talks with the students and start asking about the students' problems. GC7 said, if a teacher shows she cares, students would, in response, be motivated to study. According to GC1, teachers need to understand students; their weaknesses and their problems. If a teacher does not understand the students, they would eventually rebel or retaliate. When a teacher shows her concerns, the students would give their commitment to learning. GC4 said, she must remind herself whenever she is about to lose her temper on her students, that she must understand where the students come from, which could have caused the students to misbehave. In addition, a teacher needs to be empathetic towards students' problems. She said, a teacher needs to put herself/himself in the students' situations only then is the teacher able to tackle the problem well. GC1 further said that a teacher needs to be very patient. According to her, if the teacher did not see any result from the teachers' effort in trying to change the students, then the teacher must be very patient and never to lose hope. GC7 said a teacher must attempt to help the students and always say 'zikr' for that can be a cooling technique for the teacher. "...It is very important. We have to meditate a lot, "Astaghfirullahalazim"...It is one of the ways to cool us down" (GC7). GC1 said, in many aspects she had to be tolerant towards her students' commitment to class works due to the students' weaknesses and problems.

**'Dynamic':** Another theme that emerges from teachers' disposition is being dynamic. An effective teacher is someone who is full of life, energetic and has creative ideas. One way through which Excellent Teachers portray dynamism is through working cheerfully and showing that the teacher enjoys teaching. A teacher has to attend to many occasions and situations in the classroom which require the teacher to be active and energetic. GC5 said that teachers need to have a lot of energy and be active (GC4) for the purpose of teaching and learning. GC4 asserted that students do not respect teachers who teach while sitting down because that would only indicate the teachers' weaknesses and that they are not serious. Besides being energetic, teachers also have to be industrious as teachers need to prepare for classes, teach and grade assessments in addition to many other commitments. Another criterion of being dynamic is the

ability of Excellent Teachers to motivate students. Motivational statements from teachers can make a change in the students' life. According to GC6, "doa" or saying a prayer is a powerful motivational technique to enlighten the students' life. In addition to the "doa", she would try to guide the students to the necessary steps to achieve a goal.

Creativity may assist in the process of disciplining students. GC6 mentioned that she made variations to her "doa" so that it will suit the specific student and situation. In addition, she also used creative methods of punishment for the students such as asking the students to perform community works and to seek apologies from other teachers for their wrong doings. Meanwhile, GC5 used his capability and creativity in ICT to discipline his students such as taking passport-sized photos for his classroom reference. GC5 also plays music at the beginning of his class so as to attract students towards his lesson. Meanwhile GC1 said she would use her knowledge as a lawyer to uphold discipline. GC1 said that teachers must be well versed with the school rules. In addition, it is also essential for teachers to know laws related to education. By knowing the laws, it can help the teacher to know the right and wrong actions in education. According to GC2, teachers need to be consistent in implementing the rules that were formed in the classroom so that students understand that the teacher is serious about discipline. By being serious and consistent about discipline, students respect their teachers more.

## CONCLUSION

Excellent Teachers' perspective refers to what Excellent Teachers perceived as the necessary elements that mould and, hence, influence the teachers' resolution and the choice for classroom instruction and strategies in managing students' behaviour. The two major categories that emerged from the data were teachers' awareness and teachers' disposition. Teacher's awareness is defined as the awareness about the teaching profession itself, its demand and responsibilities that would influence the Excellent Teachers' decision-making in disciplining students. Teacher's awareness is characterized by awareness of teachers' responsibilities and awareness to put dependence in God and a realization that Allah determines everything in this life. By having this faith, teachers would not easily become disheartened or give up if their students do not show improvement after many

attempts have been made to improve students' behaviour because Allah knows what is best for both students and teachers. The most important factor is for teachers to put their best effort in helping the student. This effort needs to be incorporated with performing "do'a" or prayer for the student's well-being. It is also suggested for teachers to consistently perform self-reflection or "mu'âsabah".

The second theme that emerged from the analysis was teachers' disposition. Disposition refers to the mannerism that Excellent Teachers portray, which includes being vigorous, compassionate, dynamic and bold. Being a teacher to about thirty to forty students in the classroom, the teacher needs to be active and dynamic. Although the Excellent Teachers were expected to be strict in dealing with the class rules and regulations, ETs perceived that teacher should be an approachable person and compassionate which corroborates with [8]. According to ETs, teachers should have the feeling of empathy towards their students only then will the teacher be able to understand their students who come from various social economic backgrounds. [9] asserted that communication imbedded with empathy would develop trust between teacher and students, hence a more effective learning community is able to be established. Teachers should be able to show that they care for their students and be patient and tolerant with the various behaviours that the students display. In this situation teachers should be brilliant in choosing the best strategies in overcoming the students' problems. "Good classroom managers remain calm in crisis. They can act and react without becoming defensive, authoritarian, or emotional" [10]. ETs believe that every deed performed by the teacher must be displayed with sincerity because students were able to read teachers' behaviour and facial expressions.

Another important factor is for teachers to have knowledge of school rules and educational laws. Teachers must be well versed in the school rules so that they could work according to the rules as laid down by the Ministry of Education. According to the Excellent Teachers, classroom rules should also be embedded with the school rules for problem-free teaching and learning. Once implemented, these rules must be followed consistently so that students realize that the teacher is serious with regards to discipline, teaching and learning. Teachers must also have the knowledge of educational law, for instance "Akta Pendidikan 1996" (Education Act 1996)

[11] [12], as claimed by GC1 that many teachers did not know about the educational law. This finding is in agreement with [13] research that teachers should also have some knowledge about the educational law so that whatever teachers do and implement in the classroom should be in accordance to the educational law.

In summary, Excellent Teachers perceive that teachers should possess important criteria such as awareness of their responsibilities towards their profession and the students and their responsibilities towards the Creator. In addition, Excellent Teachers also perceived that teachers should also possess important teachers' dispositions such as being bold, compassionate and dynamic. All these would influence how teachers manage the students in the classroom, as the ability to manage is crucial to determine the flow of teaching and learning in the classroom. For future study, focus can be given on students' perspective on teachers' qualities and study can also be carried out in the form of quantitative measures.

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