

## DIAGNOSTICS OF ENGLISH TEACHERS' PREPROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE LEVELS

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**Abstract.** To improve English language teaching practices in Kazakhstan, qualified and competent teachers are needed to fulfill students' needs and meet educational goals. Thus, this paper compares perceived competence levels of pre-service and in-service English teachers by using European Profiling Grid (EPG) framework with respect to their language proficiency, and provides deeper understanding about the definition of an effective teacher by investigating the efficacy of ELT programs in terms of raising effective English teachers. To improve English teaching outcomes and teacher quality in relation to teacher education curricula, perceived competences and opinions of in-service and pre-service English teachers play a crucial role. This research aims to demonstrate what is happening in teacher education programs in Kazakhstan, how in-service and pre-service teachers perceive themselves in terms of language teacher professional competences. In total 65 pre-service and 40 in-service English teachers participated to the research. The mixed method research was employed by combining both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. To analyze the qualitative data thematic analysis method is used in order to process the obtained data SPSS 25 was used. It was found that in-service teachers had higher professional competence levels than pre-service teachers and senior ELT students had higher levels of teaching competence than freshmen ELT students indicating to a statistical significant difference across groups.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching (ELT), European Profiling Grid (EPG), ELT teacher professional competences, teacher education, training, university, program, research

### Introduction

English language teaching policies may differ from country to country in terms of application and teacher education depending on educational aims and policies. English teaching policies, implications and teacher education have been criticized as a current issue in Kazakhstan since English is the most frequently learned and taught language in Kazakhstan. Therefore there is a need for investigating ELT teacher competences and ELT departments in universities in the light of internationally set teaching standards by the EPG (European Profiling Grid) framework. To improve English teaching outcomes and teacher quality in relation to teacher education curricula, perceived competences and opinions of in-service and pre-service English teachers play a crucial role.

In this regard, this research aims to demonstrate what is happening in teacher education programs in Kazakhstan, how in-service and pre-service teachers perceive themselves in terms of language teacher professional competences.

The main aim of this research is to find out and compare English teachers', freshmen ELT students' and senior ELT students' perceived competence levels to see 3 whether pre-service teachers feel more competent as their take more courses throughout their teacher education program and whether teachers feel themselves more competent as they gain teaching experience after graduation.

#### Research Questions

1. What are the most vital features of a competent ELT teacher according to preservice and in-service English teachers?
2. What are the stated strengths and professional development preferences of practicing teachers and future teachers in terms of instructional activity?

#### **Basic provisions**

Language proficiency is regarded as a crucial indicator for a teacher's quality in the literature [1]. With the help of an improved subject knowledge and language proficiency teachers can act as role models for learners by setting them a good example of the language being learned [2]. Accordingly for being a good model in terms of accuracy, fluency, lexis and pronunciation for students, teachers' language proficiency is an indicator of a teacher's quality. Similarly, Faez and Karas [3] state that high level of language proficiency is required from teachers to be successful and qualified teachers. According to the research of Richards, Conway, Roskvist and Harvey, teachers' subject knowledge directly affects what is going on in the classroom. McNamara [4] suggests that teachers with a high level of language proficiency can easily present their knowledge by adjusting the knowledge to the students' level so that students can understand the subject matter easily.

In the ongoing debate about the importance of language teachers' proficiency, Tsang [5], comes with a new argument claiming that after a certain point of proficiency there may be other important factors in the effective teaching practices of teachers other than proficiency. In his research to examine the link between general language proficiency and students' engagement as an indicator of effective teaching, he compared native and non-native English teachers and found no differences in students' engagement. Tsang [5] explained other important constructs in effective teaching other than language proficiency such as kind and pleasant personality, sense of humor and positive relationship with students, effective pedagogy and good pronunciations and accuracy. According to the results of his research, native like proficiency does not mean effective teaching.

Cooper [6], states that teacher personality is addressed in relation to teaching style and effective teaching.

According to the research of Taneri [7], crucial personal characteristics of good teachers are listed as: having positive attitudes towards instruction, feeling self-esteem, satisfaction and empathy. She reports that there is no teacher education program addressing teachers' affective needs of pre-service teachers, most of the

teacher education programs focus on cognitive gains and neglects teachers' personal characteristics.

Most of the pre-service and in-service teachers reported their personal characteristics as their strengths in alignment with the findings of the research of Korthagen [8]. Korthagen [8] focuses on teachers' personal characteristics such as empathy, understanding and tolerance as crucial qualities for teachers in accordance with the findings of this research. Second, most frequently addressed strength was in subject matter knowledge by both pre-service and inservice teachers which is compatible with previous studies in the literature. Other areas of strength were reported as pedagogical knowledge and skills, digital competence and language proficiency which are competence areas mentioned in the literature review part of this research. In terms of teachers' language proficiency, some teachers reported their proficiency level as their weaknesses and an issue that they want to develop especially in terms of speaking and spoken production skills. Still, most of the teachers mentioned language proficiency especially in terms of oral skills by defining a competent ELT teacher especially pre-service English teachers perceive themselves not at high levels of language proficiency.

### **Materials and methods**

While determining a methodology research questions and the aim of the research play an important role. The purpose of the research is to investigate and contrast practicing and future teachers English proficiency levels and competence levels set by the EPG framework.

By taking these factors into consideration, mixed method research design is chosen. A survey was used as the research instrument to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Besides surveys are useful in describing existing relations between variables and understanding teachers' ideas about competences of a qualified ELT teacher. In total 65 pre-service and 40 in-service English teachers participated in the research. Mixed method research was employed in a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and data analysis. Quantitative data were gathered through an online survey and qualitative data were gathered via open ended interview questions.

### **Results and Discussion**

What are the most important features of a competent ELT teacher?

The purpose of this question was to reach a common and comprehensive definition of a competent language teacher. The following categories emerged from the question asked: Subject matter knowledge (ELT) (including professional subject matter qualities such as methodology, techniques, assessment and planning were included to this category), pedagogical knowledge (including classroom management, use of gestures, posture and voice, guidance, students psychology, discipline, preparing a positive classroom environment, giving instructions), personal characteristics such as advanced communication skills, being patient, having a smiling face, empathy, cuteness, being a role model, humor, positive, curious, researcher, open to innovation and change, tolerance, responsible,

hardworking, understandable, fair, motivating, open to criticism, planned, honest, open minded, problem solving skills, sensible, trustworthy, friendly, calm, willing, self confidence, punctual, energetic, loving the profession, wise, outgoing, unselfish, determined, idealist, up to date, loving, creative, helpful, inspiring, advanced listening and presentation skills, experienced, eager to learn, ethic and technology use and language proficiency level.

**In-Service Teachers' Perceptions About The Features Of a Competent Teacher.**

As the results revealed, personal characteristics was the most highly addressed theme among in-service English teachers with 111 mentions followed by pedagogical knowledge with 54 codes. Subject matter knowledge is the third most frequently mentioned theme with 58 mentions. Digital competence was coded 15 times and language proficiency was the least mentioned code with four mentions.

To demonstrate the perceptions of the participants regarding a competent teacher some of the teachers' excerpts will be provided. For example Teacher 1, is a teacher with one year of teaching experience defined a competent teacher as the individual with pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, advanced communication skills, empathy and a good pronunciation. Teacher 1, clearly gives importance to teachers' pronunciation which shows that language proficiency is an important construct of competent teachers. Teacher 2, who is an MA student with one year of teaching experience defined a competent teacher as one with good command of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge and technology, advanced communication skills, empathy open minded, creative, understanding, and guiding students appropriately. Teacher 3, with three years of teaching experience described a competent teacher as the teacher who uses communicative methods effectively, has a good command on technology, classroom management, 21st century skills, is wise, open to communication, fair, kind, understanding and has a smiling face. Teacher 3, defined a competent teacher by mentioning use of technology and 21st century skills indicating that she gives importance to teachers currency. Teacher 4, with three years of teaching experience reported that competent teacher has the main characteristics as patient, tolerant, responsible, hardworking and has good classroom management skill, good command of the field and pedagogical knowledge. Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 both used personal characteristics of teachers frequently in defining a competent teacher which demonstrate that they give importance to teachers personal features such as being kind, fair, understanding, patient and tolerant. They emphasized both the role of classroom management skill in defining a competent teacher.

Teacher 5, is being taught for four years. She described a competent teacher as one with pedagogical knowledge, advanced communication skills, empathy, a smiling face and is open to innovation, outgoing and uses the language fluently. Surprisingly unlike most of the participants she didn't mention subject matter knowledge in defining a competent teacher, rather she used codes in relation to teachers characteristics such as having advanced communication skills, smiling face, empathy and is open to innovation and outgoing. She emphasized the importance of pedagogical knowledge and fluent language use. This may be because of her limited

subject matter (ELT) knowledge. Thus she may think that personal characteristics are more important than subject matter knowledge. Teacher 6, defined a competent teacher as teacher with subject matter knowledge, a good command of teaching techniques, advanced communication skills, classroom management skill and a sense of humor and is wise, open to innovation and change, understanding, patient, fair, motivating, open to criticism and uses her voice effectively and understands students' psychology. Teacher 6, is an MA student with six years of teaching experience and used most frequently mentioned codes in defining a competent teacher such as subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, advanced communication skills and being open to change and innovation, understanding, patient, and motivating. Surprisingly she mentioned the role of understanding students' psychology in defining a competent teacher which indicates that she may be more sensitive to students feelings and psychology. Teacher 7 defines a competent teacher as person with good command on subject matter knowledge, is honest and hardworking. Teacher 8, described a competent teacher as one with necessary teaching competences, pedagogical and subject matter knowledge, advanced communication skills, and is cooperative. Teacher 9, said that competent teacher has sufficient subject matter knowledge and empathy and is wise, understanding and patient. Teacher 10 defined that competent teacher can plan a lesson in considering different learning styles. A competent teacher loves her country and has empathy for others. Teacher 7, Teacher 8 and Teacher 9 had 10 years of teaching experience and used similar codes in defining a competent teacher such as having a command of the subject matter, being honest and hardworking, having advanced communication skills, and pedagogical knowledge which demonstrates that highly used codes are used by all of the teachers from novice to experienced. On the other hand, Teacher 10 who is a very experienced teacher with 15 years of teaching experience used a different definition in describing a competent teacher by emphasizing the importance of different learning styles and love towards the country. This may be the result of her extended experience in teaching that she realized that every learner is unique and learns in different ways and at different rates.

As the excerpts indicate teachers' definitions for a competent teacher are quite similar. As the findings demonstrate most of the teachers mention personal characteristics in defining a competent teacher by using several codes like having advanced communication skills, empathy and being open minded, creative and understanding. All of the excerpts demonstrate that most frequently used themes were in relation to personal characteristics, subject matter and pedagogical knowledge in defining a competent teacher. A few teachers focused on the importance of language proficiency in defining a competent teacher which shows that teachers personal characteristics, subject matter and pedagogical knowledge are given more importance in defining a competent teacher by the teachers.

Analysis of the data indicate that pre-service English teachers' highly addressed category was teachers personal characteristics including codes like: empathy, smiling, advanced communication skills, patience, wise, open to innovation and change, sophisticated, leadership, humorous, energetic, eager to take

responsibilities, objectivity, discipline, punctual, kind, curiosity, discipline, positive, tolerance, open minded, objective, respect, outgoing, understanding, social, self confident, creative, eager, selfless, ethical, planned, improved communication skills, problem solving skills, critical, role model for students, not prejudiced, sophisticated, decisive, guiding, tolerant, fair, honest, idealist, responsible, calm, self sacrificing, motivating, trustworthy, and punctual. Below are some excerpts taken from the answers to this question; Student 1, who is a freshmen student defined that competent teacher prepares appropriate materials, has a good classroom management skill, is open to technology integration, motivated and self confident. Student 2, who is a freshman said that a competent teacher has a good command of subject matter knowledge, prepares effective lesson plans, guides students if needed, is patient, disciplined and open minded. A typical answer for freshmen students is given by Student 3, and he outlines main characteristics of good teacher with developed classroom management skills, empathy, pedagogical knowledge, advance communication skills, is patient, understanding, motivating, guide, open to innovation, change and loves the profession. As the excerpts demonstrate freshmen students generally emphasize teachers characteristics by using codes like being patient, having empathy and openness to technology and innovation. This may indicate that they give importance to teachers personal traits and technology integration. Secondly they mentioned pedagogical knowledge especially classroom management skill frequently which shows that managing a classroom well is valued by freshmen students. Student 4, who is a senior student defined a competent teacher as one with the ability to manage the classroom well, plan the lesson according to student's needs, is a good listener, understanding and has subject matter knowledge. Student 4, gives importance to lesson plans in accordance to students needs which is not mentioned highly by most of the participants indicating that she gives importance to lesson plans. Student 5, who is a senior student defined a competent teacher as professional with 21st century skills, good command of the field, is able to give effective feedback, able to prepare appropriate and educational materials, is open to development, understanding and patient, energetic, following trends in ELT and open to professional development uses innovative methods, motivates students.

Student 5 mentioned the 21st century skills and following trends in ELT and being open to professional development and using innovative methods in defining a competent a teacher which shows that the student gives importance to professional development and currency of the teachers. Student 6, who is a senior student described an effective teacher has effective communication skills, pedagogical competence, empathy, is open to change and innovation, respectful to personal differences, open to use of technology, and sensitive to students' psychology. Student 6, mentioned being respectful to personal differences and sensitive to students' psychology in defining a competent teacher which shows that she give importance to personal differences and students' psychology in education. As Student 4, Student 5, and Student 6, answers demonstrate senior ELT students mostly used codes in relation to personal characteristics such as being understood, open to innovation and technology and having empathy in general.

What are your strengths as an English teacher? List three of your strengths as an English teacher. Teachers were asked to list their three strengths in terms of teaching competences. Most of the teachers addresses their personal characteristics (*f*176) as their strengths such as: advanced communication skills, patience, empathy, being motivating, wise, understanding, creativity, been open minded, hardworking. It is followed by subject matter knowledge (*f*36) including, material design, syllabus design, using a variety of different activities, using a range of methods and techniques, giving appropriate feedback and following new trends in ELT. Pedagogical knowledge (*f*23) was mentioned most frequently in relation to classroom management and creating a positive classroom environment. Six codes were categorized as digital competence as teachers strengths in terms of using technology effectively in lessons.

In which areas would you like to improve yourself, if opportunities are provided? List three relevant areas. Teachers are asked to in which matter they would like to improve themselves if an opportunity is provided.

While coding the data, seven themes were recognizes namely; issues about students including improving students motivation and critical thinking skills (*f* 5), Use of technology (*f* 14), field knowledge (*f* 50) in terms of use of authentic materials, teaching methods and techniques, testing and evaluation, curriculum, material preparation, lesson plan planning, and designing projects, pedagogical knowledge (*f* 21) including classroom management, time management and drawing students attention, personal characteristics (*f* 6), Studying abroad and contact with native speakers (*f*9), improving language proficiency especially in terms of speaking (*f* 11).

What were the three difficulties you face throughout your profession- if there is any? The aim of this question was to detect the difficulties pre-service and inservice teachers face throughout their profession journey.

Seven themes emerged from the data of in-service teachers under this question namely; Issues about parents, administration problems, pedagogical knowledge (classroom management issues), insufficient field knowledge, environmental factors, issues about students, and characteristic factors.

Most of the pre-service teachers mentioned their personal characteristics in terms of their strengths followed by their subject matter knowledge, language proficiency and lastly pedagogical knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

In defining a competent ELT teacher most of the codes were concerning teachers' personal characteristics category mentioned by both pre-service and inservice English teachers. Similarly, in his research Tsang [5, pp.99-113] claims that there are other crucial constructs than language proficiency in describing a competent ELT teacher such as kind personality, sense of humor, positive relationship with students, pedagogy knowledge and good pronunciation and accuracy. His study's findings are in accordance with this research's results since most of the pre-service and in-service teachers in this research mentioned those teacher characteristics as personal traits of a competent ELT teacher. Like the

research of Cooper [6], Gabrielatos [9] teacher characteristics is one of the mostly addressed construct in defining a good teacher. Findings of this research demonstrated that a competent ELT teacher has to have some personal characteristics such as empathy, self confidence and positive attitudes towards teaching and students as the research of Taneri [7] indicates. Similarly according to Chang students give importance to teachers' personality traits such as empathy and fairness with are mentioned by the participants of the research repeatedly while describing a competent teacher.

Most of the pre-service and in-service teachers reported their personal characteristics as their strengths in alignment with the findings of the research of Korthagen [8]. Korthagen [8] focuses on teachers' personal characteristics such as empathy, understanding and tolerance as crucial qualities for teachers in accordance with the findings of this research. Second, most frequently addressed strength was in subject matter knowledge by both pre-service and inservice teachers which is compatible with previous studies in the literature. Other areas of strength were reported as pedagogical knowledge and skills, digital competence and language proficiency which are competence areas mentioned in the literature review part of this research. In terms of teachers' language proficiency, some teachers reported their proficiency level as their weaknesses and an issue that they want to develop especially in terms of speaking and spoken production skills. Still, most of the teachers mentioned language proficiency especially in terms of oral skills by defining a competent ELT teacher especially pre-service English teachers perceive themselves not at high levels of language proficiency. In-service teachers were willing to improve themselves in terms of subject matter knowledge mostly followed by pedagogical knowledge, digital competence, studying abroad facilities, personal characteristics and solving problems caused by students' lack of motivation and willingness to learn English. Pre-service teachers highly addressed theme in terms of improved facilities were their level of language proficiency followed by subject matter knowledge, personal characteristics, studying abroad facilities, pedagogical knowledge and digital competence.

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## **АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІ МҰҒАЛІМДЕРІНІҢ КӘСІБИ ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІК ДЕҢГЕЙІН ДИАГНОСТИКАЛАУ**

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**Аңдатпа.** Қазақстанда ағылшын тілін оқыту тәжірибесін жақсарту үшін студенттердің қажеттіліктерін қанағаттандыру және білім беру мақсаттарына жету үшін білікті және құзыретті мұғалімдер қажет. Осылайша, бұл зерттеу ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің тілді меңгеру деңгейіне қатысты еуропалық профиль торының (EPG) құрылымын пайдалану арқылы ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің және болашақ ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің құзыреттілік деңгейлерін салыстырады және құзыретті мұғалім анықтамасы туралы тереңірек түсінуге мүмкіндік береді. Ағылшын тілін оқытудың нәтижелері мен мұғалімдердің білім беру бағдарламаларына қатысты мұғалімдердің сапасын жақсарту үшін ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің біліктіліктері мен пікірлері шешуші рөл атқарады. Бұл зерттеу Қазақстандағы мұғалімдерге білім беру бағдарламаларында жағдайын, біліктілігін арттыру курсына және болашақ тіл мұғалімінің кәсіби құзыреттіліктері тұрғысынан өздерін қалай қабылдайтынын көрсетуге бағытталған. Зерттеуге барлығы 65 болашақ ағылшын тілі мұғалімі және 40 ағылшын тілі мұғалімі қатысты. Аралас зерттеу әдісі құбылысты тереңірек түсіну үшін сапалық және сандық әдістерді біріктіру арқылы қолданылды. Сапалық деректерді талдау үшін тақырыптық талдау әдісі қолданылды және сандық деректер SPSS 25 көмегімен талданды. Ағылшын тілі мұғалімдердің кәсіби құзыреттілік деңгейлері болашақ ағылшын тілі мұғалімдеріне қарағанда жоғары екені анықталды. ELT студенттері топтар арасындағы статистикалық маңызды айырмашылықты көрсетеді.

**Тірек сөздер:** Ағылшын тілін оқыту (ELT), еуропалық профильдеу жүйесі (EPG), ELT мұғалімінің кәсіби құзыреттіліктері, мұғалімнің білімі, дайындық, университет, бағдарлама, зерттеу

## **ДИАГНОСТИКА УРОВНЯ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА**

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**Аннотация.** Для улучшения практики преподавания английского языка в Казахстане необходимы квалифицированные и компетентные преподаватели, способные удовлетворить потребности обучающихся и достичь образовательных целей. Таким образом, в этой статье сравниваются предполагаемые уровни компетентности учителей английского языка до начала работы и в процессе работы с использованием структуры European Profiling Grid (EPG) в отношении их владения языком, а также обеспечивается более глубокое понимание определения эффективного учителя путем исследования эффективности Программы ELT с точки зрения подготовки компетентных учителей английского языка. Для улучшения результатов преподавания английского языка и отношения учителей к учебным программам педагогического образования решающую роль играют данные полученные после проведенного опроса касательно компетенций, умений и навыков учителей английского языка с использованием структуры European Profiling Grid (EPG). Это исследование направлено на то, чтобы продемонстрировать, что происходит в программах педагогического образования в Казахстане, как педагоги, будущие и практикующие, воспринимают себя с точки зрения профессиональных компетенций учителей иностранных языков. Всего в исследовании приняли участие 65 будущих и 40 практикующих учителей английского языка. Смешанный метод исследования был использован путем сочетания качественных и количественных методов, чтобы получить более глубокое понимание изучаемого явления. Для анализа качественных данных был использован метод тематического анализа, а количественные данные были проанализированы с использованием SPSS 25. Было обнаружено, что действующие учителя имеют более высокий уровень профессиональной компетентности, чем будущие учителя, а студенты старших курсов ELT имеют более высокий уровень педагогической компетентности, чем первокурсники. Статистически значимая разница идет между студентами ELT групп.

**Ключевые слова:** преподавание английского языка (ELT), Европейская профилирующая сетка (EPG), профессиональные компетенции преподавателя ELT, педагогическое образование, подготовка, университет, программа, исследование

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