



What Makes A Good Teacher? Exploring Student-Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract: This article explores student-teachers' perceptions of what makes a good teacher. Drawing on qualitative written reflections and online comments, the study examines how future teachers define effective teaching and which qualities they consider most important in classroom practice. The findings show that student-teachers do not define a good teacher only through subject knowledge. Instead, they describe good teaching as a combination of knowledge, clear explanation, creativity, engagement, patience, emotional support, fairness, motivation, adaptability, and passion for teaching. The strongest finding is that student-teachers view good teachers as professionals who make learning understandable, interesting, and emotionally safe. Participants emphasised that a good teacher explains difficult ideas simply, uses interactive methods, encourages learners, respects individual differences, and creates a classroom where students are not afraid to make mistakes. These findings support recent literature which conceptualises effective teaching as multidimensional, combining content knowledge, supportive learning environments, student engagement, and reflective professional growth. A good teacher is therefore not only a transmitter of knowledge, but also a facilitator of learning, a motivator, a caring adult, and a reflective professional who helps students grow academically and personally.

Keywords: Good Teacher, Effective Teaching, Student-Teachers, Teacher Qualities, Classroom Environment, Caring Pedagogy, Teacher Professionalism

Introduction

The question of what makes a good teacher remains central to teacher education because future teachers' beliefs about effective teaching shape how they understand their professional role. In many educational contexts, a good teacher is often associated with subject knowledge, discipline, and classroom control. These qualities are important, but they do not fully explain why some teachers are remembered as effective, inspiring, and transformative. A teacher may know the subject well, but if they cannot explain it clearly, engage learners, or create a supportive classroom atmosphere, learning may not happen effectively.

Recent research on teaching quality supports this broader understanding. The Great Teaching Toolkit describes effective teaching through dimensions such as understanding the content, creating a supportive environment, maximising opportunities to learn, and

activating students' thinking (Coe et al., 2020). Similarly, Hattie's recent synthesis emphasises that effective teachers are aware of their impact on learners and pay attention not only to what is taught, but also to how learning is made visible and meaningful (Hattie, 2023). These perspectives suggest that good teaching is not a single skill; it is a combination of knowledge, pedagogy, relationships, and professional judgement.

The student-teachers in this study also challenged the idea that teaching is only about knowing a subject. Their reflections show that they value knowledge, but they repeatedly argue that a good teacher must know how to communicate, motivate, support, and engage students. Student 1 stated that "being [a] good teacher is not only [about] gaining knowledge but also [about knowing] how to teach and engage students easily." Similarly, Student 2 explained that a good teacher is "not only someone who has deep knowledge of a subject, but also someone who can explain ideas in a simple and understandable way for all students." These statements show that student-teachers already understand teaching as both an intellectual and relational practice.

The purpose of this article is to analyse student-teachers' perceptions of good teaching and to connect these perceptions with recent literature on teacher effectiveness. The article argues that student-teachers construct the good teacher as a professional who combines subject knowledge, pedagogical skill, creativity, care, fairness, motivation, and moral responsibility.

Main part

Recent literature increasingly conceptualises effective teaching as multidimensional rather than as a matter of subject expertise alone. Coe et al. (2020) identify four broad dimensions of great teaching: understanding the content, creating a supportive environment, maximising opportunity to learn, and activating hard thinking. This model is useful for the present study because student-teachers' perceptions of a good teacher similarly combine knowledge, clarity, classroom relationships, engagement, and active learning. From this perspective, good teaching is not only about what teachers know; it is also about how they create the conditions in which students can understand, participate, and think deeply.

Hattie (2023) also emphasises that effective teaching requires teachers to evaluate their impact on student learning. In visible learning, the teacher is not merely a provider of content, but a professional who monitors learning, responds to evidence, clarifies goals, and supports students in becoming more confident learners. This is relevant to the present study because the student-teachers repeatedly describe good teachers as those who explain clearly, encourage learners, and help students truly understand rather than only memorise. Their perceptions therefore align with recent research that places teacher clarity, high expectations, and responsive instruction at the centre of effective teaching.

The relational dimension of teaching has also received strong attention in recent literature. The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO, 2023) describes positive teacher-student relationships as supportive and fair, developing in learning environments where students feel safe, understood, and appreciated. This perspective is especially

relevant to the present study because student-teachers repeatedly identify kindness, patience, fairness, respect, emotional safety, and trust as core features of a good teacher. In their view, learning is not only a cognitive process but also an emotional and social experience shaped by the quality of teacher-student relationships.

Although the present literature review prioritises recent sources, earlier student-perception research remains highly relevant to this study. Thompson, Greer, and Greer (2004) examined students' reflections on their favourite teachers and identified twelve characteristics of effective teachers, including fairness, positive attitude, preparedness, personal connection, sense of humour, creativity, willingness to admit mistakes, forgiveness, respect, high expectations, compassion, and creating a sense of belonging. Their findings are important for the present study because the student-teachers similarly describe good teachers as fair, supportive, creative, respectful, motivating, and able to create a safe and comfortable classroom atmosphere. This continuity suggests that students' perceptions of good teaching consistently include both professional competence and human connection.

Good teaching is also connected to teacher motivation, professional commitment, and continuous growth. The UNESCO Global Report on Teachers argues that education systems need to empower, train, and support teachers in order to strengthen the profession and ensure quality education (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024). This broader perspective matters because the student-teachers in this study describe good teachers as passionate, prepared, honest, and willing to improve. Thus, a good teacher is not a finished professional who knows everything, but a reflective practitioner who continues learning and adapting to students' needs.

This understanding is also consistent with recent discussions in TESOL teacher education. Sarimsakova and Nurmukhamedov's (2025) review of Yuan and Lee's work on becoming and being a TESOL teacher educator highlights the importance of linking research, practice, and professional becoming in teacher education. Although their publication focuses on teacher educators, it is relevant to the present article because student-teachers' perceptions of the good teacher are part of their own professional becoming. The way they define good teaching reveals the values, identities, and pedagogical beliefs they are beginning to form as future teachers.

Overall, recent and earlier literature supports the view that a good teacher is not defined by subject knowledge alone. Effective teaching requires knowledge, pedagogical clarity, emotional intelligence, creativity, fairness, high expectations, professional reflection, and the ability to build a supportive learning environment. These ideas provide a useful framework for analysing student-teachers' perceptions in the present study.

Research Questions

1. How do student-teachers define a good teacher?
2. What qualities do student-teachers identify as most important for effective teaching?
3. How do student-teachers' perceptions connect with recent literature on teacher effectiveness?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative interpretive approach to explore student-teachers' perceptions of good teaching. The data consisted of written reflections and online comments produced by student-teachers after watching and discussing a video on the question "What makes a good teacher?" Participants reflected on teacher knowledge, explanation, engagement, classroom atmosphere, motivation, creativity, fairness, emotional support, and professional passion.

The data were analysed thematically. First, all responses were read several times to identify repeated ideas. Second, similar ideas were grouped into initial codes such as subject knowledge, clear explanation, engagement, creativity, patience, support, safe environment, fairness, motivation, and passion. Third, these codes were organised into broader themes that represented student-teachers' shared perceptions of the good teacher.

To protect participants' identities, all responses were anonymised and are reported as Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, and so on. Some quotations were lightly edited with square brackets only where necessary to improve readability while preserving the original meaning. The purpose of the analysis is not to generalise to all student-teachers, but to understand how this group conceptualises the qualities of a good teacher and how their perceptions connect with contemporary literature on effective teaching.

Result and Discussion

The first major theme is that student-teachers value subject knowledge, but they do not see it as sufficient on its own. For them, knowledge becomes meaningful only when the teacher can explain it clearly and make it accessible to learners. This view was expressed strongly by Student 2, who stated that "a good teacher is not only someone who has deep knowledge of a subject, but also someone who can explain ideas in a simple and understandable way for all students." Student 3 similarly wrote that "a good teacher knows their subject well and explains it clearly," while Student 4 described a good teacher as someone who "helps students truly understand, not just memorize."

These statements show that student-teachers understand teaching as transformation rather than transmission. The good teacher is not simply someone who possesses knowledge, but someone who translates that knowledge into understanding. This finding aligns with Coe et al.'s (2020) emphasis on understanding the content and connecting it to appropriate explanations, examples, and learning tasks. It also supports Hattie's (2023) emphasis on clarity and the teacher's responsibility to make learning visible to students.

A second strong theme is engagement. Student-teachers frequently described good teachers as creative, energetic, and able to make lessons interesting. Student 5 stated that "teachers should act like performers to keep attention" because "good teaching is not only about knowledge, but also about engaging students." Student 6 developed this idea by explaining that a great teacher uses "games, creative activities, and real-life examples to keep students focused." Another participant argued that when a teacher always uses the same method, "it will bore their students and slow down the learning process."

The participants also mentioned interactive tools and activities such as Kahoot, Gimkit, Baamboozle, music, movement games, group work, and real-life examples. These

examples suggest that student-teachers associate good teaching with active participation rather than passive listening. They view creativity as a pedagogical strategy that can help students pay attention, enjoy learning, and remember material more effectively.

At the same time, the data show that student-teachers do not confuse teaching with simple entertainment. Student 7 noted that entertainment can help, but "a teacher should not be a clown"; instead, the teacher should make lessons interesting through games or interactive methods so students can see that "learning is enjoyable." This distinction is important because it shows a balanced understanding of engagement. For these student-teachers, a good teacher makes learning interesting, but the purpose remains learning.

The third theme concerns emotional safety. Student-teachers repeatedly described good teachers as kind, patient, supportive, and respectful. They argued that students learn better when they feel safe and are not afraid to ask questions or make mistakes. Student 8 explained that "a good relationship creates a safe environment" where students "are not afraid to make mistakes or ask questions." Student 6 similarly stated that a good teacher creates "a safe environment where students aren't afraid to make mistakes" and uses mistakes as "opportunities to learn rather than as reasons for criticism."

Student 9 made the same point by arguing that when learners feel "safe, comfortable, and secure," they become more confident to ask questions, express opinions, and participate actively. Another participant wrote that for shy and fearful children, a safe environment helps them learn because the teacher becomes a trustworthy person in their minds. These statements show that student-teachers understand learning as emotional as well as cognitive. A safe classroom allows students to participate, express ideas, take risks, and recover from mistakes.

This finding strongly connects with recent evidence on positive teacher-student relationships. AERO (2023) emphasises that supportive and fair teacher-student relationships develop in classrooms where learners feel safe, understood, and appreciated. The student-teachers' reflections confirm this idea from the perspective of future teachers: emotional safety is not an additional quality of good teaching, but a condition that makes learning possible.

Another important theme is motivation. Student-teachers believe that good teachers encourage learners, help them believe in themselves, and recognise even small progress. Student 10 stated that a teacher's most important role is "to show students that they are capable." Student 11 added that a good teacher should motivate students by saying, "you are capable of anything, you can do it." Similarly, Student 12 argued that praising students for "even small correct answers" is more motivating than repeatedly criticising what they do not know.

These responses show that student-teachers view motivation as a central part of good teaching. A good teacher does not only correct students; they help students develop confidence. Mistakes are not treated as evidence of failure but as part of the learning process. This is why several participants emphasised that teachers should explain mistakes gently, encourage improvement, and avoid humiliating learners.

This theme connects with Hattie's (2023) emphasis on high expectations and visible learning. Teachers who believe in students and communicate that belief can support stronger learner confidence and engagement. The student-teachers' responses suggest that a good teacher's words and actions can influence how students see themselves as learners.

Fairness and respect also appeared as key qualities. Student-teachers stated that effective teachers treat students equally, avoid humiliation, respect personal boundaries, and adapt to different learners. Student 2 noted that every learner is different and "may need more time to understand certain topics." Student 13 argued that a good teacher "must not break personal boundaries or humiliate any students." Another participant emphasised that a good teacher should be "fair and treats all students equally."

The student-teachers also connected respect with differentiation and flexibility. Student 14 explained that teachers should balance individual and group learning because individual learning gives students personal attention, while group learning allows students to share ideas and learn from one another. Other participants argued that teachers should understand students' needs, adapt their methods, and use different teaching approaches because learners do not all learn in the same way or at the same speed.

These statements suggest that student-teachers view good teaching as responsive and inclusive. A good teacher does not apply one method to all students without considering their differences. Instead, they notice learners' pace, confidence, personality, and needs. This supports recent models of teaching quality that emphasise supportive environments and maximising opportunities to learn for all students (Coe et al., 2020).

The final theme is professionalism. Student-teachers described good teachers as passionate, prepared, and committed to improvement. Student 15 argued that a person should not become a teacher only "for money," but should teach because of passion and enjoyment. Student 16 similarly stated that "a good teacher is someone who has a strong willingness to teach and truly cares about their students' learning." These statements show that student-teachers connect good teaching with inner commitment, not only external responsibility.

Preparedness was also viewed as important. Student 7 stated that a good teacher needs "proper teaching techniques, a strong vocabulary, and good planning." Student 2 also noted that "a well-prepared teacher plans lessons carefully and creates a positive and respectful classroom atmosphere." These comments suggest that student-teachers understand good teaching as intentional and planned rather than spontaneous or accidental.

At the same time, participants recognised that good teachers are not perfect. Student 17 explained that if a teacher does not know something, it is acceptable to say, "Let's check it together," because this shows honesty and teaches students how to learn independently. This finding presents the good teacher as a lifelong learner. A good teacher is knowledgeable and prepared, but also reflective, honest, and open to improvement. This idea connects with UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024), which emphasise the importance of supporting teachers' professional development and strengthening the teaching profession.

The findings show that student-teachers define the good teacher through an integrated model of competence, care, and engagement. They do not dismiss subject knowledge; instead, they recognise that teachers need accurate knowledge and professional preparation. However, they consistently argue that knowledge alone does not make a teacher effective. A good teacher must be able to explain clearly, engage learners, adapt to different needs, motivate students, and create a classroom where learners feel respected and confident.

The participants' statements strongly support recent frameworks of effective teaching. Coe et al. (2020) argue that great teaching includes understanding content, creating supportive environments, maximising opportunities to learn, and activating thinking. The student-teachers' reflections reflect all of these dimensions. Their emphasis on clear explanation relates to content understanding; their emphasis on kindness, fairness, and safety relates to supportive environments; their emphasis on games, group work, and varied methods relates to opportunities to learn; and their emphasis on understanding rather than memorising relates to deeper thinking.

These findings also correspond with Thompson, Greer, and Greer's (2004) study on the characteristics of effective teachers. Their work shows that students often remember good teachers not only for their knowledge, but also for qualities such as fairness, preparedness, respect, compassion, creativity, high expectations, and the ability to create a sense of belonging. This is closely reflected in the present study, where student-teachers repeatedly described good teachers as fair, patient, supportive, creative, motivating, and respectful. The connection between the two studies suggests that students' perceptions of good teaching continue to emphasise both professional competence and human connection.

The strong focus on emotional safety is especially significant. Student-teachers repeatedly mentioned kindness, patience, empathy, respect, and trust. Their reflections suggest that students cannot learn effectively if they feel afraid, judged, or humiliated. This supports AERO's (2023) emphasis on positive teacher-student relationships as supportive and fair relationships built in classrooms where students feel safe, understood, and appreciated. In the participants' perceptions, caring is not separate from academic learning; it makes academic learning possible.

Another important point is that student-teachers associate good teaching with active engagement. The repeated references to games, performance, creativity, movement, online quizzes, group work, and real-life examples suggest that they value teachers who can make learning lively and meaningful. However, they also recognise that engagement must remain professional. A good teacher is not simply an entertainer; rather, the teacher uses creativity to support understanding, participation, and motivation.

The findings also have implications for teacher education. If student-teachers already associate good teaching with motivation, creativity, reflection, and continuous improvement, teacher education programs should create more opportunities for them to develop these qualities in practice. This aligns with recent discussions in TESOL teacher education that understand becoming a teacher or teacher educator as a process of forming professional identity, linking research with practice, and reflecting on one's pedagogical

role (Sarimsakova & Nurmukhamedov, 2025). Thus, the student-teachers' perceptions in this study are not only descriptions of good teachers; they also reveal the kind of teachers they aspire to become.

Overall, the study suggests that future teachers hold a complex and relational view of effective teaching. They see the teacher as a knowledgeable expert, a clear communicator, a creative facilitator, a caring adult, a motivator, and a reflective learner. This has important implications for teacher preparation. Teacher education should not focus only on subject knowledge or methodology; it should also help future teachers develop emotional intelligence, relational awareness, inclusive practices, creativity, and reflective professionalism.

Conclusion

This article explored student-teachers' perceptions of what makes a good teacher. The findings show that student-teachers define good teaching as more than subject knowledge. For them, a good teacher explains clearly, makes lessons engaging, supports students emotionally, treats learners fairly, adapts to individual differences, motivates students, and continues learning.

The central argument emerging from the data is that good teaching is both professional and relational. A good teacher knows what to teach, but also knows how to teach, how to connect with students, and how to create the conditions in which students feel confident to learn. Student-teachers' perceptions therefore support recent literature that effective teachers combine competence with care, engagement, and reflection. The good teacher is not only someone who delivers knowledge, but someone who helps students understand, participate, believe in themselves, and grow.

For teacher education, these findings suggest that student-teachers should be supported not only in developing subject knowledge and teaching techniques, but also in building relational and reflective capacities. If future teachers learn to value clarity, care, engagement, fairness, motivation, and continuous learning, they will be better prepared to create classrooms where students feel safe, active, and inspired to learn.

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