Scientific Research Publishing

Open Journal of Modern Linguistics, 2026, 16(6), 734-761
https://www.scirp.org/journal/ojml
ISSN Online: 2164-2834
ISSN Print: 2164-2818

Perceptual Differences in EFL Teachers' Core Competencies across School Stages: A Study of Stage-Level Characteristics

Meifang Jiang[1]*, Jiashi Hu[2], Xiaoyu Sun[1]

[1]School of Foreign Studies, Lingnan Normal University, Zhanjiang, China
[2]School of Education, City University of Macau, Macau, China
Email: *jiangmeifang2005@163.com, 10869704@qq.com

How to cite this paper: Jiang, M. F., Hu, J. S., & Sun, X. Y. (2026). Perceptual Differences in EFL Teachers' Core Competencies across School Stages: A Study of Stage-Level Characteristics. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics, 16,* 734-761.
https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2026.166042

Received: November 3, 2026
Accepted: November 23, 2026
Published: November 26, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Open Access

Abstract

Perceptual differences between teachers and students may lead to misaligned teaching objectives, low classroom engagement, and other issues. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study conducts a comparative analysis of the differences in perceptions of the core competencies of EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers among university teachers and students versus those among secondary-school teachers and students, as well as the correlations among these perceptions. The findings indicate that significant differences exist in teachers' and students' perceptions across dimensions such as teaching management and full-English instruction, while a high degree of consensus is observed regarding ethical boundaries for teachers and teaching democracy; students' perceptions show significant differences based on gender and educational stage, whereas teachers' perceptions exhibit only a marginal correlation with subject area; and perceptions-based consensus influences students' learning behaviors through positive learning experiences and supportive environmental influences. The results enrich the empirical foundation of research on teacher competence and provide practical guidance for the training of foreign-language teachers and the optimization of classroom management.

Keywords

EFL Teachers, Core Competencies, Perceptual Differences, Stage-Level

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of digital transformation, English language education has exhibited a distinct trend of shifting from knowledge transmission to the cultivation of core competencies (Tian & Wang, 2021). English language education em-

phasizes not only the integrated application of language skills, but also the development of intercultural communicative competence, critical thinking, and digital literacy (Liu & Shan, 2017). This poses entirely new demands on the role of EFL teachers, resulting in significant changes to the connotation and extension of their core competencies. Owing to differences between teachers and students in knowledge understanding, learning approaches, thinking patterns, and perceptual levels, systematic differences arise between them in educational perception, value judgment, and behavioral expectations; such differences are referred to as perceptual differences (Wang et al., 2009). Teaching is a process jointly participated in by teachers and students. When teachers and students hold significantly different perceptions of teachers' core competencies, problems such as misaligned teaching objectives and reduced classroom engagement may occur, thereby constraining the improvement of teaching efficacy (Yang & Chen, 2020). Better learning outcomes can only be achieved when teachers and students share a consistent understanding of teachers' core competencies.

This study focuses on the core competencies of foreign language (EFL) teachers and the analysis of teacher-student perceptual differences, and explores the factors influencing the formation of such differences, with a view to providing a reference for teacher education, pre-service teacher curriculum design, and foreign language teaching, thereby promoting substantive improvement in the quality of English language education. Accordingly, this study addresses the following three research questions: 1) What are teachers' and students' perceptions of the core competencies of EFL teachers, and what similarities and differences exist between them? 2) To what extent are these perceptions associated with gender, age, and educational stage? 3) How do these perceptions influence students' learning?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on the Core Competencies of EFL Teachers

Research on the core competencies of EFL teachers, both in China and abroad, has yielded a relatively rich body of theoretical frameworks and practical explorations. International research began earlier and has centred mainly on teachers' professional competence, pedagogical ability and personality traits. Borg (2015) proposed that the core characteristics of excellent language teachers include solid linguistic knowledge, flexible teaching methods and sensitivity to learners' needs. Richards (2017) further argued that intercultural communicative competence and digital teaching literacy have become key capabilities for English teachers in a globalized context. In addition, Hattie (2018), drawing on meta-analytic evidence, found a significant positive correlation between teachers' emotional support and students' academic achievement, thereby underscoring the importance of the affective dimension of teachers' core competencies. Domestic research, by contrast, has placed greater emphasis on integrating local educational contexts. Chen (2014) argued that outstanding Chinese teachers exhibit a holistic understanding of teaching and learning together with a mode of action characterized by the unity of

knowing and doing, and that these habits of thought and action constitute the personal philosophy on which they anchor their professional lives. In recent years, with the advancement of competency-based education, Chen (2017), taking "dual-qualification" competence—that is, the capacity both to impart linguistic knowledge and to cultivate students' critical thinking—as a starting point, analyzed and discussed, from the perspective of self-driven development, the individual construction pathways of English teachers' dual competencies, with a view to helping teachers achieve individual self-growth. Wang et al. (2023) employing the TPACK theoretical framework, examined the current state of university English teachers' ICT-based teaching competence and its influencing factors, and offered recommendations for developing such competence among English teachers in the new era.

Most existing studies have focused on the teacher's perspective, with little attention to the core competencies of teachers of specific disciplines or to the bidirectional perceptions of teachers and students; they have consisted predominantly of quantitative studies based on single samples, and mixed-methods research using cross-level samples remains scarce. This study adopts a mixed-methods design, taking teachers and students from a normal university and from key secondary schools as its participants, in order to explore the differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of EFL teachers' core competencies and the factors influencing those differences, thereby providing a reference for the development and training of EFL teachers against the backdrop of digital transformation.

2.2. Research on Teacher-Student Perceptual Differences

Research on teacher-student perceptual differences originates in educational psychology and social constructivist theory. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development first suggested that instructional effectiveness depends on the degree of cognitive alignment between teachers and students. Subsequent studies have refined this line of inquiry; Wubbels et al. (2012), for instance, found that discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom interaction patterns lead to a decline in teaching effectiveness. The Chinese scholar Huang (2020) analyzed perceptions of "teacher-student co-creation" from the teacher's perspective, proposing that teachers' overall quality should be comprehensively enhanced, that teachers should be helped to clarify the organizational forms of "teacher-student co-creation," and that their awareness of its role should be strengthened and brought into play. In the field of language teaching, research on perceptual differences has centred mainly on teaching objectives, methods and assessment. Barkhuizen (2021) compared teachers' and students' perceptions of language learning objectives and found that teachers placed greater emphasis on grammatical accuracy whereas students were more concerned with communicative competence. Yang and Chen (2020) in a comparative study of teachers' and students' perceptions of university teachers' instructional leadership, found that teachers' perceptions were significantly higher than those of students, that teachers held

a somewhat biased view of themselves, and that perceptual differences were influenced by teachers' gender and disciplinary background. Wang et al. (2009) analyzed teacher-student perceptual differences regarding the content of ICT-based instructional design and put forward reasonable strategic recommendations.

In summary, most findings in the existing literature pertain to the basic education stage; research on teacher-student perceptual differences in higher education is relatively scarce, and cross-level, cross-disciplinary investigations of such differences are scarcer still. Analyses of the causes of these differences in the extant literature have generally remained at a superficial level and have not examined their consequences in depth. The present study therefore takes teachers and students from universities and secondary schools in City Z as its participants, compares and analyses their perceptions of EFL teachers' core competencies, and explores the factors influencing those perceptions, with the aim of offering a new perspective for optimizing pre-service teacher curricula, teacher education, and the articulation of English teaching across educational levels.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Sample

The study took teachers and students from an undergraduate normal university and key secondary schools as its participants. The teachers comprised both English-subject teachers and teachers of other subjects, while the university students covered all non-arts and non-physical-education disciplines. A total of 603 questionnaires were collected, all of which were valid. The demographic composition of the sample (Table 1) is as follows: 51 teachers, of whom 20 were male (39.3%) and 31 female (60.7%); 20 were secondary school teachers (39.3%) and 31 university teachers (60.7%); 22 were English-subject teachers (43.1%) and 29 were teachers of other subjects (56.9%); and their ages ranged from 30 to 45 years. Among the 552 students, 146 were male (26.4%) and 406 female (73.6%); 113 were secondary school students (20.5%) and 439 were university students (79.5%); and their ages ranged from 16 to 20 years.

Table 1. Sample demographic statistics.

Participants	Quantity (%)	Gender (%)		Educational stage (%)		Age (%)
		Man	Woman	University	Middle school	
Teacher	51 (8.5%)	20 (39.3%)	31 (60.7%)	31 (60.7%)	20 (39.3%)	30 - 45 (100%)
Student	552 (91.5%)	146 (26.4%)	406 (73.6%)	439 (79.5%)	113 (20.5%)	16 - 20 (100%)
Total	603 (100%)	166 (27.5%)	437 (72.5%)	470 (77.9%)	133 (22.1%)	

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1. Instrument Development

A structured questionnaire was developed on the basis of the teacher competence framework of Metsäpelto et al. (2022), using a seven-point Likert scale (1 =

strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to measure teachers' and students' perceptions of EFL teachers' core competencies. The questionnaire comprised two sections: a) personal information (gender, educational stage, disciplinary background); and b) 37 competence items describing teacher characteristics. The stem for all 37 items asked respondents to rate how essential each characteristic is for an excellent EFL teacher. Teachers and students received identical wording and therefore rated the same target—the ideal EFL teacher—rather than their own or their teachers' current practice. All scores are interpreted as expectations (the importance respondents attach to each characteristic), not as measures of teaching behaviour, teaching quality or self-reported practice.

Items were generated from the framework and prior literature and were then reviewed by three professors of applied linguistics for relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness; as a result, 8 of the 37 items (21.6%) were reworded for ambiguity, and no item was deleted at this stage. The 37 items were hypothesized to represent five dimensions (Table 2): professional competence (7 items), teaching competence (9), teacher-student interaction (7), personal character (10), and teaching management (4).

3.2.2. Pilot Study and Content Validity

A pilot test was conducted with n = 30 respondents drawn from the same population but excluded from the main analyses. Item-total correlations were all ≥ 0.4, no item showed floor or ceiling effects, and average completion time was five minutes. Minor wording adjustments were made after the pilot; the final instrument is shown in Table 2.

3.2.3. Exploratory Factor Analysis

The EFA was conducted on the N = 603 valid questionnaires (teachers n = 51, students n = 552; university students n = 439, secondary students n = 113), giving a respondent-to-item ratio of 16.3:1, above the 10:1 guideline. The pilot respondents (n = 30) were excluded from these analyses. Sampling adequacy was high, KMO = 0.973, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, χ^2 (666) = 14,382.6, $p < 0.001$, confirming that the correlation matrix was factorable (all individual MSA values ≥ 0.93). Factors were extracted using principal axis factoring and rotated obliquely using promax ($\kappa = 4$), because the five dimensions were theoretically and empirically correlated (inter-factor r = 0.54 - 0.79). An orthogonal varimax rotation was run as a robustness check and produced the same item-to-factor assignment. The number of factors was determined by the joint use of (a) Kaiser's eigenvalue > 1 rule, (b) the scree plot, (c) parallel analysis (500 random datasets), and (d) interpretability. Kaiser's criterion suggested six factors (sixth eigenvalue = 1.12), whereas the scree plot, parallel analysis and interpretability supported five; the sixth factor contained only two items with primary loading ≥ 0.50 and was not interpretable and was therefore not retained. Items were retained if they had a primary loading ≥ 0.50, no cross-loading ≥ 0.40, a communality ≥ 0.40, and conceptually interpretable content. All 37 items met these criteria and

Table 2. Item composition of the five dimensions.

No.	Dimension	Items constituting the dimension
1	Professional competence	1. Holds a higher degree and a senior professional title
		2. Has published multiple research papers/led multiple research projects
		3. Possesses extensive knowledge of English
		4. Demonstrates authentic English pronunciation and intonation
		5. Speaks English fluently
		6. Is well versed in educational and pedagogical theories
		7. Possesses a broad knowledge of world cultures
2	Teaching competence	1. Employs varied and flexible teaching methods
		2. Organises and manages the classroom effectively
		3. Delivers instruction entirely in English
		4. Uses plain and readily comprehensible instructional language
		5. Conveys a rich amount of instructional content
		6. Integrates online resources
		7. Integrates educational technology
		8. Teaches in a rigorous and meticulous manner
		9. Delivers high-quality instruction
3	Teacher-student interaction	1. Listens to students' concerns
		2. Treats students fairly
		3. Attends to students' physical and mental well-being
		4. Provides targeted learning guidance
		5. Responds to students' emotional needs
		6. Responds enthusiastically to students' questions
		7. Creates a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere
4	Personal character	1. Is dedicated to the teaching profession
		2. Has a strong sense of responsibility
		3. Is honest and trustworthy
		4. Is humorous and witty
		5. Is gentle in temperament
		6. Does not regard teaching merely as a means of earning a living
		7. Dresses appropriately and serves as a role model for students
		8. Keeps abreast of the times
		9. Engages in self-reflection
		10. Maintains harmonious relations with colleagues and students

Continued

5	Teaching management	1. Involves students in decision-making and planning 2. Awards high scores for continuous assessment 3. Does not call on students by name to answer questions in class 4. Assigns a modest amount of homework
Total	5	37

were retained, so the five factors comprised 7, 9, 7, 10 and 4 items respectively. The five factors had eigenvalues of 16.42, 3.05, 2.28, 1.86 and 1.41 and explained 44.4%, 8.2%, 6.2%, 5.0% and 3.8% of the variance respectively (67.6% cumulatively; Table 3). Primary loading ranged from 0.58 to 0.86 (median 0.74) and communalities from 0.42 to 0.79.

3.2.4. Reliability of the Sub-Scales

Internal consistency was assessed separately for each dimension. *Cronbach's* α was 0.91 for professional competence, 0.93 for teaching competence, 0.92 for teacher-student interaction, 0.93 for personal character, and 0.84 for teaching management; McDonald's ω ranged from 0.84 to 0.93. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.56 to 0.83, and no item would have raised its sub-scale α if deleted. The α for the full 37-item scale was 0.979, but because α is strongly influenced by the number of items, the sub-scale coefficients in Table 4 are the appropriate indices of reliability.

3.2.5. Construct Validity

To test the five-factor structure obtained in the EFA, a confirmatory factor analysis was run on the same sample, N = 603. The hypothesized five-factor model fitted the data acceptably: χ^2 (619) = 1426.8, χ^2/df = 2.31, CFI = 0.951, TLI = 0.948, RMSEA = 0.047 (90% CI [0.044, 0.050]), SRMR = 0.041. All standardized loading exceeded 0.50 (range 0.58 - 0.86), and AVE ranged from 0.51 to 0.66 with CR from 0.81 to 0.94, indicating convergent validity for all five dimensions. The inter-factor correlations (r = 0.54 - 0.79) were all below the square root of the corresponding AVE values, supporting discriminant validity.

3.2.6. Sampling and Data Collection

A stratified multistage cluster sampling strategy was adopted, with stratification by gender (male/female), educational stage (university/senior secondary) and subject (English/non-English). Data were collected via the *Wenjuanxing* platform in August 2024, together with informed consent forms and an incentive mechanism. Of the questionnaires distributed, 603 were returned and 603 were valid, giving an effective response rate of 100% . Teachers' and students' responses were matched by class/institution, not by individual, to preserve anonymity.

3.2.7. Interview Data

Interview data were collected through asynchronous online in-depth interviews

delivered via *Wenjuanxing* in the form of open-ended questions, to which teachers and students responded in writing or by speech-to-text. The interview guide focused on two questions: 1) What are the most important characteristics of EFL teachers' core competencies, and why? 2) What effects do these characteristics have on students' learning behaviour? Random sampling was carried out in the participating secondary schools and universities, yielding 175 interviewees: 100 university students (46 male, 54 female), 55 secondary school students (25 male, 30 female), and 20 teachers (10 male, 10 female). Of these, 53 participants (30.3%) were asked to check the accuracy of the summarized interpretations in a member-checking procedure.

3.3. Data Analysis

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, with the aim of integrating statistical generalizability with an in-depth understanding of students' perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The scale data were subjected to descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests (to examine differences between teachers' and students' perceptions) and multiple regression models (to analyse the weights of the dimensions) using SPSS 26.0, so as to analyse the differences between teachers' and students' perceptions across the five dimensions of EFL teachers' core competencies. The interview data were processed mainly through anonymous thematic coding (e.g., T01 denoting Teacher No. 1 and S01 denoting Student No. 1). The raw texts were processed through a three-stage coding procedure: semantic units were extracted in the first round, themes were clustered in the second round, and dimensional characteristics were finally distilled. NVivo 14 was used for thematic coding in the analysis. To safeguard the validity of the study, a double-blind coding procedure was used to test inter-coder reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$), and member checking was performed with a random 29% of the interviewees ($n = 175$), confirming a thematic saturation level of 91.3%.

4. Research Results

4.1. Overall Trends in Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of EFL Teachers' Core Competencies

Teachers and students attached different degrees of importance to four of the five dimensions (**Table 3**). The largest divergence, and the only reversal, concerned teaching management (teachers 4.43 vs students 5.04; MD = −0.61; d = −0.72): autonomy-supportive practices were regarded as less essential by teachers than by students. Two readings are compatible with this pattern. Teachers, as practitioners, may weigh such practices against feasibility—class size, syllabus coverage, assessment requirements—and therefore rank leniency lower as a criterion of excellence, whereas students, as recipients, may rank the same practices higher because they bear their immediate costs. Alternatively, the three items in the composite are the only ones in the instrument that trade off directly

against instructional control, so the divergence may reflect a genuine disagreement about what counts as good management rather than about teaching quality in general. Second, teachers rated teaching competence (6.06 vs 5.72; MD = 0.34; d = 0.38) and professional competence (5.63 vs 5.36; MD = 0.27; d = 0.41) as more essential than students did—modest gaps consistent with practitioners weighting the craft dimensions of the role more heavily. Third, the two groups' expectations were close on teacher-student interaction (5.99 vs 5.85; d = 0.16) and indistinguishable on personal character (5.70 vs 5.68; d = 0.03). Crucially, the divergence on the management composite did not extend to the decision-making item, on which the two groups were indistinguishable (5.57 vs 5.51; d = 0.06), a point taken up in §4.2 (5).

Correlation analyses further reveal that students' perceptions (Table 4) of EFL teachers' core competencies display differentiated patterns of association with gender and educational stage. Female students are more attentive to the "soft" pedagogical strengths and affect-oriented teaching practices of their teachers, showing consistent positive correlations with teacher-student interaction (r = 0.145, $p = 0.001$), teaching competence (r = 0.136, $p = 0.001$), and personal character (r = 0.104, $p = 0.014$). No gender differentiation, however, is found for teaching management (r = 0.057, $p = 0.181$) or professional competence (r = 0.079, $p = 0.065$). As educational stage advances, all competence dimensions exhibit highly significant positive correlations ($p < 0.001$), with teaching management showing

Table 3. Overall trends in perceptual differences of core competencies (N = 603).

Dimension	Average (Teacher)	Average (Student)	Mean difference	t value	p value	95% CI
Teaching competence	6.06	5.72	+0.34	6.41***	<0.001	[0.24, 0.44]
Teacher-student interaction	5.99	5.85	+0.14	2.67**	0.008	[0.04, 0.24]
Personal character	5.70	5.68	+0.02	0.35	0.728	[−0.10, 0.14]
Professional competence	5.63	5.36	+0.27	4.92***	<0.001	[0.16, 0.38]
Teaching management	4.43	5.04	−0.61	−9.02***	<0.001	[−0.73, −0.49]

Note: ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$; the plus or minus sign indicates the direction of the difference (+: teacher > student; −: student > teacher).

Table 4. Correlation in the five dimensions of students.

Variable	Gender		Educational stage	
	Pearson correlation	p value	Pearson correlation	p value
Teaching management	0.057	0.181	0.283**	0.000
Personal character	0.104*	0.014	0.208**	0.000
Teacher-student interaction	0.145**	0.001	0.278**	0.000
Teaching competence	0.136**	0.001	0.247**	0.000
Professional competence	0.079	0.065	0.182**	0.000

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

the strongest association (r = 0.283), followed by teacher-student interaction (r = 0.278) and teaching competence (r = 0.247). This highlights the distinctive demand for disciplinary management and the reliance on complex instructional strategies at the university level. Professional competence, while significant, is the weakest correlate (r = 0.182), indicating that foundational disciplinary knowledge is universally relevant across stages. These differences imply that English teacher development policy needs a dual-track support mechanism: on the one hand, leveraging female teachers' strengths in affective instruction; on the other, constructing stage-progressive competency standards that prioritize strengthening university teachers' classroom management capacity and higher-order instructional strategies. At the same time, the stability of professional competence suggests that teacher training should transcend stage boundaries and establish a subject-knowledge renewal system spanning the entire career.

Teacher data (Table 5) are reported for N = 51 and treated as exploratory. Gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and educational stage (0 = secondary, 1 = university) were entered as dichotomous variables, and point-biserial correlations were computed with the five dimension scores. No coefficient reached the 0.05 threshold. For educational stage, the largest association was with the reverse-coded management composite (r = 0.259, $p = 0.066$, $r^2 = 0.07$), followed by teacher-student interaction (r = 0.140, $p = 0.329$), personal character (r = 0.126, $p = 0.379$), teaching competence (r = 0.089, $p = 0.535$) and professional competence (r = 0.073, $p = 0.609$). For gender, the largest associations were with teacher-student interaction (r = 0.269, $p = 0.056$) and teaching competence (r = 0.259, $p = 0.067$). Because ten coefficients were tested, the Bonferroni-adjusted threshold is $\alpha = 0.005$, and with N = 51 the study has 80% power to detect only $r \approx 0.38$. The data therefore provide no evidence that teachers' expectations differ by gender or by the stage at which they teach, and the near-threshold coefficients would need replication in a larger sample. No subject-background analysis is reported: with 22 English and 29 non-English teachers such an estimate would be unstable, and the earlier suggestion of a subject-background difference has been withdrawn.

Table 5. Correlation in the five dimensions of teachers.

Variable	Gender		Educational stage	
	Pearson correlation	p value	Pearson correlation	p value
Teaching management	0.050	0.726	0.259	0.066
Personal character	0.224	0.114	0.126	0.379
Teacher-student interaction	0.269	0.056	0.140	0.329
Teaching competence	0.259	0.067	0.089	0.535
Professional competence	0.193	0.174	0.073	0.609

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

4.2. Perceptual Differences and Correlations within Specific Dimensions

1) Perceptual differences and Correlations in the professional competence Dimension

The most conspicuous difference in teachers' and students' views of English teachers' professional competence (Table 6) concerns language proficiency: the item "Demonstrates authentic English pronunciation and intonation" shows the largest difference (teachers 6.31 vs. students 5.71; MD = 0.60; d = 0.68), which suggests that the two groups apply different criteria to the same attribute—articulatory accuracy on the teachers' side, intelligibility on the students'. That practitioners weight the model they are expected to provide, and recipients the outcome they need to receive, is the most parsimonious reading; the data do not allow it to be tested against alternatives such as stage-related differences in exposure. Substantial difference also exists regarding knowledge base: teachers rate "Extensive knowledge of English" as high as 6.18, well above students' 5.80 (d = 0.42), indicating that teachers value systematic knowledge whereas students require practical assistance. Both groups, however, attached similar importance to "Possesses a broad knowledge of world cultures" (d = 0.08) and to "'Is well versed in educational and pedagogical theories" (d = 0.12), deeming these important and emphasizing that such knowledge must be convertible into actual instructional content. In terms of research capacity, although a certain rating gap exists for "Has published multiple research papers/led multiple research projects" (d = 0.32), neither group scores this item highly (teachers 4.57/students 4.29), and the gap for "Holds a higher degree and a senior professional title" is likewise small (d = 0.18), indicating that neither party regards academic research as a core teaching competence. Conversely, "Speaks English fluently" commands consensus (d = 0.36).

Table 6. Comparison of perceptual differences in the professional competence dimension.

Feature description	Average (Teacher)	Average (Student)	Mean difference	Cohen's d	Effect size interpretation
Holds a higher degree and a senior professional title	4.67	4.52	0.15	0.18	Differences may be negligible
Has published multiple research papers/led multiple research projects	4.57	4.29	0.28	0.32	Small effect (teacher > student)
Extensive knowledge of English	6.18	5.80	0.38	0.42	Small effect (teacher > student)
Demonstrates authentic English pronunciation and intonation	6.31	5.71	0.60	0.68	Moderate effect (teacher > student)
Speaks English fluently	6.14	5.82	0.32	0.36	Small effect (teacher > student)
Is well versed in educational and pedagogical theories	5.49	5.38	0.11	0.12	Differences may be negligible
Possesses a broad knowledge of world cultures	6.04	5.97	0.07	0.08	Differences may be negligible
Dimensional Synthesis	5.63	5.36	0.27	0.41	Small effect (teacher > student)

Overall, teachers generally emphasize their own level of professional competence. Nevertheless, improvements are recommended in the following respects: pronunciation training should give greater weight to communicative effectiveness, knowledge transmission should be strengthened in practicality, and research activities should demonstrably enhance instructional outcomes, thereby balancing professional standards against students' actual needs.

Correlation analysis (Table 7) shows that female students are more concerned with whether English teachers excel in language and culture. Their perceptions correlate significantly and positively with English knowledge (r = 0.110, p = 0.010), pronunciation and intonation (r = 0.110, p = 0.009), oral fluency (r = 0.117, p = 0.006), and general cultural knowledge (r = 0.127, p = 0.003), but show no statistical association with academic qualifications and titles (r = −0.013, p = 0.757) or publications and research projects (r = −0.020, p = 0.633). This indicates that female students impose higher demands than male students on language-practice competencies, whereas teachers' research and academic capacity is unaffected by gender. As educational stage advances, the strongest correlations are those with English knowledge (r = 0.243, $p < 0.001$) and general cultural knowledge (r = 0.246, $p < 0.001$), while pronunciation and intonation (r = 0.114, p = 0.007) and oral fluency (r = 0.153, $p < 0.001$), though significant, yield lower coefficients. This underscores university students' deeper disciplinary expectations of English, while basic language skills are already widely attained at the secondary stage; the correlation with teaching theory (r = 0.177, $p < 0.001$) further reveals that the university stage places greater emphasis on the capacity to translate theory into practice. Across all stages, no effective association emerges with explicit qualification indicators (academic qualifications and titles, r = 0.056, p = 0.188; publications and research projects, r = 0.049, p = 0.253). It follows that teacher development policy should establish gender-differentiated support strategies to give full play to female teachers' strengths in language and culture instruction; that the university stage should focus on deepening disciplinary

Table 7. Correlation in the professional competence dimension.

Variable	Gender		Educational stage	
	Pearson correlation	p value	Pearson correlation	p value
Professional title	−0.013	0.757	0.056	0.188
Research papers/projects	−0.020	0.633	0.049	0.253
Extensive English knowledge	0.110**	0.010	0.243**	0.000
Pronunciation and intonation	0.110**	0.009	0.114**	0.007
Fluent speaking	0.117**	0.006	0.153**	0.000
Pedagogical theory	0.046	0.276	0.177**	0.000
Broad knowledge of world cultures	0.127**	0.003	0.246**	0.000

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

knowledge and cultural literacy; and that teacher evaluation mechanisms should be reformed by reducing the weight of "hard" indicators such as academic qualifications and titles in teaching appraisal and by establishing a developmental assessment system centred on teaching practice capacity.

2) Perceptual Differences and Correlations in the Teaching Competence Dimension

Table 8 shows that, at the dimension level, teachers rated teaching competence slightly higher than students did (6.06 vs 5.72 on a seven-point scale; MD = 0.34; d = 0.38, small effect). Teacher ratings exceeded student ratings on all nine items, but the size of the gap varied considerably. The largest divergence concerned delivering instruction entirely in English (5.96 vs 5.33; MD = 0.63; d = 0.71), the only item in the moderate effect range. The next largest gaps were for the use of plain and readily comprehensible instructional language (6.08 vs 5.64; MD = 0.44; d = 0.49), a rich amount of instructional content (6.10 vs 5.72; MD = 0.38; d = 0.43), rigorous and meticulous teaching (6.24 vs 5.89; MD = 0.35; d = 0.40), and varied and flexible teaching methods (6.24 vs 5.89; MD = 0.35; d = 0.39). Smaller but non-negligible gaps were found for effective classroom organization and management (6.18 vs 5.87; MD = 0.31; d = 0.35), the integration of educational technology (5.78 vs 5.47; MD = 0.31; d = 0.35), and the integration of online resources (5.90 vs 5.66; MD = 0.24; d = 0.27). Only the global item "delivers high-quality instruction" approached parity (6.06 vs 6.01; MD = 0.05; d = 0.06, negligible). In sum, seven items produced small effects, one a moderate effect, and one a negligible difference.

They indicate differences in how the two groups evaluate the same teaching behaviors, not established differences in performance. The moderate gap for English-medium instruction is the only point at which students' evaluations fell

Table 8. Comparison of perceptual differences in the teaching competence dimension.

Feature description	Average (Teacher)	Average (Student)	Mean difference	Cohen's d	Effect size interpretation
Employs varied and flexible teaching methods	6.24	5.89	0.35	0.39	Small effect (teacher > student)
Organizes and manages the classroom effectively	6.18	5.87	0.31	0.35	Small effect (teacher > student)
Delivers instruction entirely in English	5.96	5.33	0.63	0.71	Moderate effect (teacher > student)
Uses plain and readily comprehensible instructional language	6.08	5.64	0.44	0.49	Small effect (teacher > student)
Conveys a rich amount of instructional content	6.10	5.72	0.38	0.43	Small effect (teacher > student)
Integrates online resources	5.90	5.66	0.24	0.27	Small effect (teacher > student)
Integrates educational technology	5.78	5.47	0.21	0.31	Small effect (teacher > student)
Teaches in a rigorous and meticulous manner	6.24	5.89	0.35	0.40	Small effect (teacher > student)
Delivers high-quality instruction	6.06	6.01	0.05	0.06	Differences may be negligible
Dimensional Synthesis	6.06	5.72	0.34	0.38	Small effect (teacher > student)

clearly and substantially below teachers' self-reports, and it may therefore merit attention: whether students' comprehension is adequately supported could be examined, for example, through judicious use of the mother tongue when explaining key concepts, short periodic surveys of student understanding, or adjustment of the proportion of English used to the level of the class. The two technology items (d = 0.27 and 0.35) similarly suggest a review of how far digital resources are perceived to support instruction, although both effects are small. It should also be noted that "delivers high-quality instruction" is a global judgement that overlaps conceptually with the dimensional synthesis and should not be treated as an independent facet of competence.

Correlation analysis (Table 9) indicates that the sub-dimensions of teaching competence are markedly differentiated by gender and educational stage. Gender is significantly associated with all dimensions except English-medium instruction ($p < 0.05$), with the highest correlations found for accessible instructional language (r = 0.155**, $p < 0.001$) and classroom management (r = 0.141**, $p = 0.001$), while technology integration shows a weak gender difference (r = 0.088*, $p = 0.039$). This suggests that female students are more attentive to teachers' core attributes in affective delivery and technological integration, expecting both comprehensible instructional language and a digital learning environment. English-medium instruction capacity is the only item without a gender difference (r = 0.056, $p = 0.191$), indicating that practical language proficiency is not constrained by gender. Educational stage exhibits a stronger and more systematic influence, with all nine sub-dimensions reaching high significance ($p < 0.01$). The cognitive complexity of teaching shows the most pronounced increase with stage: "information richness" (r = 0.262**) and "accessible instructional language" (r = 0.273**) occupy the top two positions, highlighting the dual demand at the university

Table 9. Correlation in the teaching competence dimension.

Variable	Gender		Educational stage	
	Pearson correlation	p value	Pearson correlation	p value
Flexible teaching methods	0.112**	0.008	0.172**	0.000
Effective classroom organization	0.141**	0.001	0.220**	0.000
Entire English instruction	0.056	0.191	0.115**	0.007
Accessible instructional language	0.155**	0.000	0.273**	0.000
Information richness	0.117**	0.006	0.262**	0.000
Integrated resources	0.133**	0.002	0.191**	0.000
Integrated technology	0.088*	0.039	0.191**	0.000
High-quality instruction	0.120**	0.005	0.193**	0.000
Rigorous manner	0.089*	0.037	0.210**	0.000

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

level for depth of knowledge and precision of expression. Advanced pedagogical requirements are concentrated in "flexible teaching methods" (r = 0.172**) and "Integrated resources" (r = 0.191**), reflecting the need at higher stages for more complex cognitive strategies. English-medium instruction (r = 0.115**) shows a significantly lower stage correlation than the other dimensions (ranking last), indicating that language-medium skills do not differ markedly across stages. It follows that gender differences primarily shape the style of instructional delivery, whereas educational stage drives upward transitions in professional competence levels. Teacher preparation may therefore develop gender-responsive pedagogy training modules, establish stage-progressive competency certification standards, and prioritize strengthening university teachers' capacity to construct cognitive scaffolding—in particular, remedying shortcomings at the university stage in "making complex knowledge accessible" (accessible instructional language) and "structuring vast amounts of information" (information richness).

3) Perceptual Differences and Correlations in the Teacher-Student Interaction Dimension

Table 10 shows that teachers and students held closely similar views on all seven interaction items: every effect size was small or negligible ($d \leq 0.25$), and the composite difference was negligible (5.99 vs 5.85; MD = 0.14; d = 0.16). Five items fell below the negligible threshold. The closest agreement concerned a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere (5.84 vs 5.80; MD = 0.04; d = 0.04), followed by responding enthusiastically to students' questions (6.10 vs 6.00; MD = 0.10; d = 0.11), responding to students' emotional needs (5.84 vs 5.71; MD = 0.13; d = 0.15), treating students fairly (6.04 vs 5.90; MD = 0.14; d = 0.16), and listening to students' concerns (6.20 vs 6.03; MD = 0.17; d = 0.19—the largest of the negligible effects and the highest teacher rating in this dimension). Only two items reached the small-effect range: attending to students' physical and mental well-being (6.08 vs 5.86; MD = 0.22; d = 0.25) and providing targeted learning guidance (6.06 vs 5.86; MD = 0.20; d = 0.23). In both cases teachers rated themselves higher than students did, although students' absolute ratings remained high

Table 10. Comparison of perceptual differences in the teacher-student interaction dimension.

Feature description	Average (Teacher)	Average (Student)	Mean difference	Cohen's d	Effect size interpretation
Listens to students' concerns	6.20	6.03	0.17	0.19	Differences may be negligible
Treats students fairly	6.04	5.90	0.14	0.16	Differences may be negligible
Attends to students' physical and mental well-being	6.08	5.86	0.22	0.25	Small effect (teacher > student)
Provides targeted learning guidance	6.06	5.86	0.20	0.23	Small effect (teacher > student)
Responds to students' emotional needs	5.84	5.71	0.13	0.15	Differences may be negligible
Responds enthusiastically to students' questions	6.10	6.00	0.10	0.11	Differences may be negligible
Creates a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere	5.84	5.80	0.04	0.04	Differences may be negligible
Dimensional synthesis	5.99	5.85	0.14	0.16	Differences may be negligible

(5.86 of 7), so the two groups differ in degree rather than in kind.

They indicate that the two groups evaluate teacher-student interaction very similarly, not that interaction quality has been established. The two items that produced small effects suggest directions for practice: making care more visible to students (for example, periodic records of students' psychological state or brief individual check-ins) and making guidance more precise (for example, individual learning portfolios updated over time). Whether such measures actually narrow the gap between teachers' self-ratings and students' perceptions would need to be tested directly.

Correlation analysis (Table 11) shows that female students display higher expectations across most interaction dimensions. Specifically, female students are significantly attentive to English teachers' "Listens to students' concerns" (r = 0.136, $p = 0.001$), "Treat students fairly" (r = 0.133, $p = 0.002$), "Attends to students' physical and mental well-being" (r = 0.122, $p = 0.004$), "Provides targeted learning guidance" (r = 0.160, $p < 0.001$), "Responds enthusiastically to students' questions" (r = 0.105, $p = 0.014$), and creating "a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere" (r = 0.159, $p < 0.001$). No gender difference exists, however, for "Responds to students' emotional needs" (r = 0.043, $p = 0.312$). As educational stage advances, all interaction behaviors correlate significantly and positively with stage ($p < 0.01$). Overall, educational stage exerts broader coverage (all seven items) and stronger effects (correlation coefficients 0.174 - 0.290) on teacher-student interaction behaviour, whereas gender has only limited influence on six dimensions. "Responds to students' emotional needs" is the only dimension affected by educational stage but not by gender, indicating that emotionally supportive behaviour depends more on the structural demands of the stage (e.g., academic pressure at university) than on teachers' gender characteristics.

4) Perceptual Differences and Correlations in the Personal Character Dimension

Table 12 shows that, at the dimension level, teachers' and students' ratings of EFL teachers' personal character were essentially identical (5.70 vs 5.68; MD =

Table 11. Correlation among dimensions of teacher-student interaction.

Variable	Gender		Educational stage	
	Pearson correlation	p value	Pearson correlation	p value
Listens to students' concerns	0.136**	0.001	0.290**	0.000
Treat students fairly	0.133**	0.002	0.250**	0.000
Attends to students' physical and mental well-being	0.122**	0.004	0.203**	0.000
Provides targeted learning guidance	0.160**	0.000	0.259**	0.000
Responds to students' emotional needs	0.043	0.312	0.174**	0.000
Responds enthusiastically to students' questions	0.105*	0.014	0.208**	0.000
Creates a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere	0.159**	0.000	0.251**	0.000

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Table 12. Comparison of perceptual differences in the personal character dimension.

Feature description	Average (Teacher)	Average (Student)	Mean difference	Cohen's d	Effect size interpretation
Is dedicated to the teaching profession	5.96	5.87	0.09	0.10	Differences may be negligible
Has a strong sense of responsibility	6.24	6.05	0.19	0.21	Small effect (teacher > student)
Dresses appropriately and serves as a role model for students	4.94	4.64	0.30	0.34	Small effect (teacher > student)
Maintains harmonious relations with colleagues and students	5.78	5.68	0.10	0.11	Differences may be negligible
Keeps abreast of the times	5.38	5.24	0.14	0.16	Differences may be negligible
Engages in self-reflection	6.14	5.90	0.24	0.27	Small effect (teacher > student)
Is honest and trustworthy	5.98	5.91	0.07	0.08	Differences may be negligible
Is humorous and witty	5.65	5.98	−0.33	−0.38	Small effect (students > teachers)
Is gentle in temperament	5.78	6.05	−0.27	−0.31	Small effect (students > teachers)
Does not regard teaching merely as a means of earning a living	5.16	5.46	−0.30	−0.34	Small effect (students > teachers)
Dimensional synthesis	5.70	5.68	0.02	0.03	Differences may be negligible

0.02; d = 0.03, negligible), although item-level differences varied in both size and direction. On the seven items rated higher by teachers, four produced small effects: serving as a role model in dress and appearance (4.94 vs 4.64; MD = 0.30; d = 0.34, the largest teacher-side gap and the lowest pair of means in the dimension), engaging in self-reflection (6.14 vs 5.90; MD = 0.24; d = 0.27), having a strong sense of responsibility (6.24 vs 6.05; MD = 0.19; d = 0.21), and dedication to the profession (5.96 vs 5.87; MD = 0.09; d = 0.10). The remaining three were negligible: keeping abreast of the times (5.38 vs 5.24; d = 0.16), maintaining harmonious relations (5.78 vs 5.68; d = 0.11), and honesty/trustworthiness (5.98 vs 5.91; d = 0.08). On the three items rated higher by students, all differences were small: humorous and witty (5.65 vs 5.98; MD = −0.33; d = −0.38), gentle in temperament (5.78 vs 6.05; MD = −0.27; d = −0.31), and not regarding teaching merely as a means of earning a living (5.16 vs 5.46; MD = −0.30; d = −0.34).

Two features of this pattern deserve comment. First, the direction of the gaps does not divide cleanly along the lines of "professional norms" versus "personal charisma:" the second-largest student-side gap (−0.34) concerns an item about the meaning of teaching as a livelihood, i.e., a professional-values item, while honesty (0.08) and dedication (0.10) show almost no difference at all. Professional ethics is therefore a heterogeneous category in these data, not one on which the two groups simply agree. Second, because every effect is small or negligible and the composite effect is negligible, the overall picture is one of close agreement rather than pronounced divergence.

Because these are perceptual ratings of the same behaviors rather than measures

of observed practice or of the importance respondents attach to each attribute, they indicate that the two groups evaluate these character attributes similarly, not that either group prizes charisma more. The items on which students rated teachers lower (humour, gentleness) and the item on which teachers rated themselves lowest (appearance/role modelling) may nevertheless be worth follow-up—for example, through items that ask directly how much each attribute matters to respondents, and through observational or student-feedback measures that could establish whether the modest perceptual gaps reflect differences in behaviour.

Correlation analysis (Table 13) shows that female students display higher levels across most dimensions. Specifically, female students are significantly more attentive to such traits as "Is dedicated to the teaching profession," "Has a strong sense of responsibility," "Maintains harmonious relations with colleagues and students," "Keeps abreast of the times," "Engages in self-reflection," and "Is humorous and witty." No gender differences appear, however, in the four dimensions of "Dresses appropriately and serves as a role model for students," "Is honest and trustworthy," "Is gentle in temperament," and "not treating teaching as a mere means of living." As educational stage advances, significant positive correlations ($p < 0.01$) emerge for English teachers' "Is dedicated to the teaching profession," "Has a strong sense of responsibility," "Maintains harmonious relations with colleagues and students," "Keeps abreast of the times," "Engages in self-reflection," "Is honest and trustworthy," "Is humorous and witty," "Is gentle in temperament," and professional identity ("Does not regard teaching merely as a means of earning a living"). The sole exception is "Dresses appropriately and serves as a role model for students," which shows a weak but significant negative correlation ($r = -0.110$, $p = 0.010$), reflecting that university students' expectations of a good English teacher are not expressed in terms of external dress norms.

Table 13. Correlation in the personal character dimension.

Variable	Gender		Educational stage	
	Pearson correlation	p value	Pearson correlation	p value
Is dedicated to the teaching profession	0.086*	0.044	0.243**	0.000
Has a strong sense of responsibility	0.145**	0.001	0.268**	0.000
Dresses appropriately and serves as a role model for students	−0.034	0.420	−0.110**	0.010
Maintains harmonious relations with colleagues and students	0.108*	0.011	0.150**	0.000
Keeps abreast of the times	0.125**	0.003	0.178**	0.000
Engages in self-reflection	0.105*	0.014	0.222**	0.000
Is honest and trustworthy	0.080	0.060	0.130**	0.002
Is humorous and witty	0.101*	0.017	0.198**	0.000
Is gentle in temperament	0.073	0.087	0.231**	0.000
Does not regard teaching merely as a means of earning a living	0.043	0.314	0.154**	0.000

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Overall, educational stage exerts broader coverage and stronger effects on teachers' personal character (coefficients generally above 0.13), whereas gender has only limited influence on certain dimensions. "Dresses appropriately and serves as a role model for students" is the only trait negatively associated with educational stage—a contradictory phenomenon that merits further exploration.

5) Perceptual Differences and Correlations in the Teaching Management Dimension

Table 14 shows that the largest divergence in the instrument concerned the reverse-coded management composite (students 5.04 vs teachers 4.43; MD = −0.61; t = −9.02, $p < .001$; d = −0.72). Students attached greater importance than teachers to lenient continuous assessment (5.51 vs 4.82; d = −0.78), to a light homework load (4.86 vs 4.27; d = −0.67) and to not being called on by name (4.76 vs 4.20; d = −0.63). The fourth management item, which is worded in the same direction as the remaining dimensions and is therefore analyzed separately, showed no such divergence: the two groups attached equal importance to involving students in decision-making (5.57 vs 5.51; d = 0.06). This distinction qualifies the reading of the composite. Students were not simply more favorably disposed towards laxity: on the one item that redistributes authority rather than reducing its exercise, they agreed with teachers. The divergence is confined to practices that relieve pressure on students at some cost to instructional control, which locates it in the allocation of classroom authority rather than in disagreement about educational ends. Practically, this identifies where negotiation is most needed—assessment transparency, homework expectations, and how participation is invited—while suggesting that the case for shared decision-making does not need to be argued: both groups already endorse it. Whether redistributing authority along these lines would improve learning outcomes is a question these cross-sectional expectation data cannot answer.

Correlation analysis (Table 15) shows that, with respect to teaching management style, gender bears no statistically significant association with any of the four management behaviors: "Awards high scores for continuous assessment" (r = 0.052, $p = 0.219$), "Does not call on students by name to answer questions in class" (r = 0.040, $p = 0.343$), "Assigns a modest amount of homework" (r = 0.029,

Table 14. Comparison of perceptual differences in the teaching management dimension.

Feature description	Average (Teacher)	Average (Student)	Mean difference	Cohen's d	Effect size interpretation
Awards high scores for continuous assessment	4.82	5.51	−0.69	−0.78	Moderate effect (students > teachers)
Does not call on students by name to answer questions in class	4.20	4.76	−0.56	−0.63	Moderate effect (students > teachers)
Assigns a modest amount of homework	4.27	4.86	−0.59	−0.67	Moderate effect (students > teachers)
Involves students in decision-making and planning	5.57	5.51	0.06	0.06	Differences may be negligible
Dimensional synthesis	4.43	5.04	−0.61	−0.72	Moderate effect (students > teachers)

Table 15. Correlation in the teaching management dimension.

Variable	Gender		Educational stage	
	Pearson correlation	p value	Pearson correlation	p value
Awards high scores for continuous assessment	0.052	0.219	0.169**	0.000
Does not call on students by name to answer questions in class	0.040	0.343	0.349**	0.000
Assigns a modest amount of homework	0.029	0.500	0.198**	0.000
Involves students in decision-making and planning	0.023	0.586	0.184**	0.000

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

$p = 0.500$), and "Involves students in decision-making and planning" (r = 0.023, $p = 0.586$). All teaching management behaviors, however, correlate significantly and positively with advancing educational stage ($p < 0.01$). Specifically, students expect teachers to reduce classroom roll-call markedly ("Does not call on students by name to answer questions in class:" r = 0.349, the strongest effect), to systematically reduce homework load ("Assigns a modest amount of homework:" r = 0.198), to increase student participation in decision-making ("Involves students in decision-making and planning:" r = 0.184), and to grade continuous assessment more leniently ("Awards high scores for continuous assessment:" r = 0.169). Overall, educational stage exerts a fully encompassing (all four items significant) and high-intensity (coefficients 0.169-0.349) influence on teaching management behaviour, whereas gender has no substantive explanatory power. "Does not call on students by name to answer questions in class," as the most typical stage-marker practice (r = 0.349), reflects the need for university English teachers to shift their role from controller to facilitator.

These differences reveal a deeper tension in English language education: a misalignment between teachers' adherence to traditional professional standards (authentic pronunciation, English-medium instruction) and the needs students care about most (flexible management, teacher approach-ability). Teachers therefore need to adjust their priorities—relaxing unilateral standards such as authentic pronunciation and strengthening the practical competencies students value (e.g., whether instruction is intelligible)—while establishing teacher-student negotiation mechanisms to open dialogue on the most contested issues, such as grading, balancing academic requirements against the learning experience while safeguarding instructional quality, and shifting from unilateral teacher dominance towards support attuned to student needs.

4.3. Factors on the Teacher-Student Perceptual Differences of Core Competencies

According to the students' interviews (Table 16), which indicated that the most important competence of EFL teachers is "Comprehensive teaching competence" (frequency 119 - 150), encompassing oral fluency, the capacity to teach through well-chosen cases, interactive and differentiated teaching methods, humorous

Table 16. Factors from student interviews (N = 155).

Dimension	Themes	Free node (high-frequency keywords from interview)	Frequency
Comprehensive teaching competence	Teaching competence	Fluent spoken English; clear expressions; extensive subject knowledge; effective use of examples; strong logical organization	142 (91.6%)
	Teaching methods	Frequent classroom interaction; gamified instruction; integration of multimedia; task-based activities; differentiated instruction	131 (84.5%)
	Personality traits	Humorous and engaging; patient and conscientious; egalitarian and respectful; enthusiastic and energetic; approachable	150 (96.7%)
	Professional attitude	Thorough lesson preparation; prompt feedback on assignments; attention to student differences; encouragement of questioning; after-class tutoring	119 (76.7%)
Positive learning experience	Psychological experience	Low learning pressure; relaxed and enjoyable lessons; feeling understood and respected; sense of achievement; reduced anxiety	147 (94.8%)
	Competence development	Easily comprehensible content; improved expressive ability; acquisition of learning methods; broadened cultural horizons; stimulation of thinking	137 (88.4%)
	Emotional connection	Perceived teacher care; strong sense of trust; willingness to communicate proactively; admiration for the teacher; teacher-friend relationship	127 (81.9%)
Positive learning transformation	Learning motivation	Shift from passive to active learning; increased out-of-class study time; proactive seeking of English-learning resources; anticipation of English lessons	144 (92.9%)
	Classroom participation	Active answering of questions; voluntary participation in group work; willingness to speak English; increased frequency of questioning	134 (86.5%)
	Learning strategies	Beginning to imitate the teacher's pronunciation; organizing class notes; formulating study plans; applying teacher-recommended methods	124 (80%)
	Learning outcomes	Improved examination performance; greater oral fluency; stronger logical structure in writing; deeper intercultural understanding	131 (84.5%)
	Long-term impact	Formation of English-learning habits; pursuit of English-related further study or careers; sustained engagement with English-language information	91 (58.7%)

and patient personality traits, and a professional attitude that emphasizes feedback and differentiation. Students believed that this creates a positive learning experience: 94.8% of students reported reduced anxiety because classes were relaxed and enjoyable (psychological experience), 88.4% found knowledge easier to understand and their expressive ability improved (competence development), and 81.9% developed trust through perceiving teacher care (emotional connection). Such experiences can directly trigger positive learning transformations, including enhanced learning motivation (92.9%), increased classroom participation (86.5%), proactive optimization of learning methods (80%), improved learning outcomes (84.5%), and the cultivation of lifelong learning habits (58.7%). It can therefore be inferred that, by reducing emotional anxiety and enhancing self-efficacy, teachers' pedagogical competence generates a positive cycle of "high teaching efficacy-positive learning experience-beneficial behavioral transformation," thereby fostering deep learning engagement and sustained development.

Teacher interviews (Table 17) showed that the core competence of EFL teachers

Table 17. Factors from teacher interviews (N = 20).

Dimensions	Themes	Free node (high-frequency key words from interview)	Frequency
Professional competence	Professional ability	Participation in training programs; enhancement of professional competence; classroom observation; improvement of teaching quality	18 (90%)
	Overall competence	Joining teacher research communities/master-teacher studios; enhancement of overall competence	17 (85%)
	Advancement of qualifications and rank	Upgrading of professional title, academic degree and qualifications	17 (85%)
Teaching competence	Innovation in teaching methods	Adoption of multiple teaching methods to meet individualized needs; integration of information technology to improve teaching efficiency	18 (90%)
	Reflective improvement of teaching	Reflecting on and summarizing problems and shortcomings in teaching	18 (90%)
	Development of a distinctive teaching style	Establishing a personal teaching signature to enhance teaching effectiveness	18 (90%)
Respond to student needs	Attention to individual learning needs	Attention to individual student differences; differentiated instruction	19 (95%)
		Attention to students' learning needs; provision of targeted guidance	18 (90%)
	Provision of emotional value	Attention to students' emotional needs; provision of emotional support	18 (90%)
Fostering teacher-student relationships	Role positioning	Becoming students' mentor and friend	19 (95%)
	Cultivation of personal charisma	Becoming "an interesting soul"	17 (85%)
Professional attitude	Values education	Integration of *Kecheng Sizheng* (curriculum-based ideological and political education) into teaching to help students develop sound values	17 (85%)
	Enhancement of political literacy	Improvement of ideological and political qualities; practice of core socialist values	17 (85%)

is markedly characterized by professional practice. Ninety-five per cent of teachers regarded "precisely responding to learning needs" (teaching according to aptitude, 95%; targeted guidance, 90%) and "emotional connection" (emotional value support, 90%) as the core of EFL teacher competence, and held that establishing a mentor-friend style teacher-student relationship (95%) can promote the construction of a low-anxiety, high-trust learning environment. In addition, 90% of teachers believed that continuous pedagogical innovation (multiple teaching methods, 90%; technology integration, 90%) and deep reflection (problem-driven improvement, 90%), together with the construction of distinctive teaching (90%) and participation in professional communities (85%), can foster a dynamically optimized teaching competence system and advance teachers' core competence development. Teaching reflection not only facilitates pedagogical innovation but also drives teachers to translate students' emotional needs into concrete teaching strategies, producing a synergistic effect between "professional empowerment" and "emotional connection." Although professional title advancement (85%) and the integration of ideological and political education (85%) were endorsed, their

contribution to core competence was significantly lower than that of practices acting directly on student development. This reflects teachers' view that highly competent teachers promote student growth while simultaneously enhancing their own professional adaptability—a developmental path that begins with teaching reflection, is realized through innovative practice, and culminates in a learning ecosystem supported along both cognitive and emotional dimensions.

It can thus be seen that the standards of EFL teacher core competence as defined by students have shifted from the traditional model of professional authority towards a new framework comprising three key dimensions: pedagogical transformative capacity (converting knowledge into comprehensible content), interactive inclusiveness (accommodating students of differing proficiency levels), and emotional catalysis (optimizing the learning experience). These perceptual differences stem primarily from the distinct roles of "learning experiences" and "teaching practitioners." Students focus on the direct individual experiences generated by teacher behaviors, attending to concrete teaching abilities, methods, personality traits and professional attitudes, as well as their immediate effects on their own psychology, competence and emotions and the resulting changes in learning behaviour. Teachers, by contrast, focus on the dynamic construction of the instructional system, emphasizing the dual drivers of "precise response to needs + emotional connection" and "continuous innovation + deep reflection," and attending to the dynamic optimization of the teaching competence system and the establishment of a learning ecosystem supported along both cognitive and emotional dimensions. The former constitutes micro-level, concrete experiential perception, whereas the latter represents meso-level, abstract systemic logic; the two are complementary and jointly oriented towards instructional improvement centred on student growth.

5. Discussion

5.1. Research Findings

This study explores the similarities and differences in, the influences of, and the correlations between teachers' and students' perceptions of EFL teacher core competence. The main findings are as follows:

1) Similarities and differences in perceptions. The sharpest divergence concerned the three reverse-coded management items (grade leniency, name-calling, homework load; d = 0.63 - 0.78): teachers regarded autonomy-supportive practices as less essential than students did. Further divergences appeared in English-medium instruction (d = 0.71) and in pronunciation and intonation (d = 0.68), where teachers attached greater importance to the professional-standard criteria than students did. Expectations converged on the ethical baseline of professional character ("is honest and trustworthy," d = 0.08; "is dedicated to the teaching profession," d = 0.10) and on involving students in decision-making (d = 0.06)—the one management item that shares authority rather than relaxing it. Because that item sits outside the reverse-coded composite and is worded in the same direction as the other constructs, its convergence is not merely the absence of a difference:

it indicates that the two groups hold the same view of who should participate in classroom decisions while weighting the costs of day-to-day control differently.

2) Correlations. Among students, expectations varied with gender and with educational stage. Female students attached greater importance than male students to the language-practice, interaction and personal-character items, though every association was small (r = 0.10 - 0.16) and none appeared for teaching management or research capacity; because the correlates here are respondents' own characteristics, these coefficients describe whose expectations are higher, and nothing about the gender of the teachers those students encounter. With advancing educational stage, expectations rose across most dimensions (r = 0.17 - 0.35), the largest single association being the declining importance attached to being called on by name (r = 0.349), consistent with the greater weight students place on autonomy as they progress. Among teachers, no dimension was associated with gender or educational stage at conventional levels (largest: stage with the management composite, r = 0.259, $p = 0.066$), and with ten tests conducted that coefficient does not survive correction; the earlier suggestion of a subject-background difference has been withdrawn.

3) Effects on student learning behaviour. Students believed that teachers' comprehensive pedagogical competence (oral proficiency, teaching methods, etc.) can create positive experiences, alleviate anxiety and facilitate the understanding of knowledge, thereby triggering beneficial transformations such as enhanced learning motivation and increased participation, and can further promote lifelong learning. Teachers believed that such competencies as "precise response to needs" and "emotional connection" can build a favourable learning environment, form a competence system through reflection and innovation, and promote student learning through cognitive and emotional support.

Teachers and students differed in the importance they attached to teaching management, English-medium instruction and pronunciation and intonation—teachers weighting the professional and instructional dimensions of the role more heavily, students weighting the three autonomy-supportive management practices more heavily—while their expectations converged on professional ethics and on involving students in decision-making. Students' expectations varied weakly with gender and more strongly with educational stage, whereas teachers' expectations were associated with neither once multiplicity was taken into account. In interviews, students linked comprehensible and affectively supportive teaching to a more positive learning experience and to changes in their own study behaviour, and teachers described responding to individual needs and building emotional connection as central to their practice; these are participants' accounts rather than estimates of effect. The study specifies which competencies the two groups weight differently, and by how much, and distinguishes a divergence over the exercise of classroom control from a shared view of its distribution. Its limits are a regionally concentrated sample, a small teacher subsample, cross-sectional expectation data rather than observation of practice, and the hypothetical nature of preference

judgements; longitudinal and observational designs are needed to establish whether aligning expectations changes what happens in classrooms.

The conclusions of this study both echo and extend the existing literature. With regard to teacher-student perceptual differences, existing research has generally identified discrepancies in role expectations (Hargreaves, 2003); the present study further quantified the dimensions of difference, such as the significant divergence in teaching management (grade assessment, classroom roll-call, etc.; d = 0.56 - 0.69) and in English-medium instruction (d = 0.71), thereby corroborating the theoretical framework that "teachers prioritize norms and professional standards while students prioritize autonomy and practicality" (Borg, 2015). The perceptual difference in pronunciation and intonation (d = 0.68) addresses a gap in the existing literature concerning the divergent prioritization of "the form of linguistic output" versus "communicative effectiveness." Regarding consensus dimensions, the high consistency between teachers and students on the ethical baseline of professional ethics, teaching effectiveness and teaching democracy (d = 0.05 - 0.18) is consistent with the "core consensus model of teacher-student relationships" proposed by Wubbels et al. (2014); in particular, the cross-group endorsement of "teaching democracy" provides empirical support for building inclusive classrooms. The finer-grained finding that teachers value responsibility more whereas students prefer humour extends existing discussion of "differences in preferences for professional character." In the correlation analysis, female students' higher expectations of teacher competence and the elevated demands associated with advancing educational stage are consistent with the gender-difference finding that "women are more attentive to relationship quality" (Eagly, 1987) and with the developmental claim that "learners' need for autonomy increases" (Little, 2007). The finding that teachers' perceptions were only marginally correlated with subject background in the teaching-management dimension (r = 0.259, $p = 0.050$) challenges the presumption that "subject differences lead to differentiated perceptions of teacher competence" (Shulman, 1987) and reveals the cross-disciplinary consistency of core professional traits. With respect to mechanisms of influence, teachers' and students' perceptions act on student learning through a "positive experience-emotional support" pathway, which both echoes Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory concerning "the activating role of environmental support for motivation" and, through the empirical finding on "lifelong learning capacity," extends existing discussion of the long-term effects of teacher competence.

In summary, this study adopted a dual-subject (teacher and student) perspective and incorporated a cross-stage, cross-disciplinary sample into the measurement, thereby enhancing sample heterogeneity. Through paired-sample collection, it examined the interactive characteristics of perceptual differences, overcoming the separation of subjects that characterized previous research. It also developed a scale comprising a four-dimensional framework of "teaching management-professional competence-teacher-student interaction-personal character," incorporating new dimensions such as "teaching democracy" and "the application

of digital teaching tools," which better reflects the digital instructional context. The introduction of effect sizes (d values) to quantify the strength of differences helps to delineate dimensions more precisely and compensates for the limitation of conventional significance testing, which merely determines whether differences exist. The multi-dimensional cross-analysis offers a more finely grained interpretive perspective on the subtle association between subject background and perceptions of teaching management.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

Although the sample spans multiple educational stages, it does not cover all stages, and it is drawn mainly from urban institutions and key secondary schools in moderately developed areas; it therefore cannot adequately reflect the perceptual characteristics of teachers and students in regions differing in economic development and educational resource allocation, and regional bias may affect the universality of the conclusions. In addition, the sample of non-English subject teachers was relatively small (23%), and the study did not track dynamic changes in perceptions, making it difficult to reveal the diachronic mechanisms by which perceptions are formed. Future research should expand sample coverage, include schools in less developed areas and international education settings for comparative analysis, and, through longitudinal surveys combined with classroom observation, deepen cross-disciplinary comparative research.

6. Conclusion

This study found that teachers' and students' perceptions of EFL teacher core competence differ significantly in dimensions such as teaching management and English-medium instruction, converge on the ethical baseline of professional ethics and on teaching democracy, and that students' perceptions are significantly influenced by gender and educational stage, whereas teachers' perceptions are only marginally correlated with subject background in the teaching-management dimension; teachers' and students' perceptions jointly influence student learning behaviour through positive experiences and a supportive environment. Theoretically, this study quantified the specific dimensions and effect sizes of teacher-student perceptual differences, enriching the empirical foundation of research on teacher competence; practically, it provides targeted reference for EFL teacher training and the optimization of classroom management. It is hoped that differentiated teacher development programs may be designed in future to balance instructional norms and student autonomy. However, this study is limited by regional sampling and methodological staticness; future cross-regional longitudinal research may extend it further and explore in greater depth the mechanisms underlying the dynamic evolution of perceptions.

Funding

This study is sponsored by the Project: Guangdong Provincial Education Science

Planning Project—Study on the Role Expectations of "Excellent English Teachers" among University Faculty and Students in the New Era (2022GXJK254), 2024 Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education Demonstration Course Project (Humanities and Social Sciences) in Lingnan Normal University, Course Title: College English IV and Smart Foreign Language Instructional Design and Resource Development (2026JSJY63).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. W.H. Freeman.

Barkhuizen, G. (2021). *Language Teacher Educator Identity*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108874083

Borg, S. (2015). *Teacher Cognition and Language Education: Research and Practice*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Chen, X. (2014). An Exploration of the Characteristics of Excellent Teachers' Thinking and Action in Teaching. *Educational Research, 35,* 128-138. (In Chinese)

Chen, Y. (2017). Exploring the Self-Driven Development Paths of "Double-Qualified" College English Teachers in Application-Oriented Undergraduate Institutions. *Exploration of Higher Education, No. S1,* 44-45. (In Chinese)

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Hargreaves, A. (2003). *Teaching in the Knowledge Society: Education in the Age of Insecurity*. Teachers College Press.

Hattie, J. (2018). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge.

Huang, Z. (2020). Teacher-Student Co-Creation: An Empirical Study of Teachers' Cognitive Differences and Action Orientations. *Journal of Nanjing Normal University (Social Science Edition), No. 3,* 27-38. (In Chinese)

Little, D. (2007). Language Learner Autonomy: Some Fundamental Considerations Revisited. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1,* 14-29. https://doi.org/10.2167/illt040.0

Liu, C., & Shan, F. (2017). The Common Core and Differences of Intercultural Communicative Competence in College English Courses: An Interpretation of the College English Teaching Guide Based on Legitimation Code Theory. *Foreign Language World, No. 4,* 79-87. (In Chinese)

Metsäpelto, R., Poikkeus, A., Heikkilä, M., Husu, J., Laine, A., Lappalainen, K. et al. (2022). A Multidimensional Adapted Process Model of Teaching. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 34,* 143-172. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-021-09373-9

Richards, J. C. (2017). Teaching English through English: Proficiency, Pedagogy and Performance. *RELC Journal, 48,* 7-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688217690059

Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform. *Harvard Educational Review, 57,* 1-23. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.57.1.j463w79r56455411

Tian, Z., & Wang, W. (2021). From Foreign Language Teaching to Foreign Language Education: The Significance and Modes of Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Construction in University Foreign Language Courses and Its Impact on Teachers' Roles. *Modern English, No. 7,* 1-6, 14. (In Chinese)

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.

Wang, Y., Tian, J., & Wang, W. (2009). An Analysis of Cognitive Differences between Teachers and Students in the Teaching of "Technology-Enhanced Instructional Design". *Modern Educational Technology, 19,* 22-26. (In Chinese)

Wang, Y., Wang, J., Han, H. et al. (2023). An Investigation into the Current State of Technology-Enhanced Teaching Competence among English Teachers in Chinese Universities. *Foreign Language World, No. 2,* 54-61. (In Chinese)

Wubbels, T., Brekelmans, M., den Brok, P., & van Tartwijk, J. (2014). Teacher-Student Relationships and Classroom Management. In E. T. Emmer, & E. J. Sabornie (Eds.), *Handbook of Classroom Management* (2nd ed., pp. 363-386). Routledge.

Wubbels, T., den Brok, P., van Tartwijk, J., & Levy, J. (2012). *Interpersonal Relationships in Education: An Overview of Contemporary Research*. Sense Publishers Rotterdam.

Yang, M., & Chen, Y. (2020). A Comparative Study of Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of University Teachers' Instructional Leadership. *Heilongjiang Researches on Higher Education, 38,* 39-43. (In Chinese)