

Relationship between Teacher's Personality, Monitoring, Learning Environment, and Students' EFL Performance

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ABSTRACT

Teachers have been widely acknowledged to critically influence students' learning and achievement. Nonetheless, the effects of teacher characteristics on student communication proficiency in the context of English as foreign language (EFL) learning have not received adequate attention among scholars. In contrast to most studies in the area, this article focuses on the influence of teacher-student interpersonal engagements, namely teacher's personality and monitoring, on EFL student communication proficiency. The purpose of this study is to explore whether teacher's characteristics and environmental learning factors influence students' overall communication proficiency. Drawing on sociocultural theory, the authors assume that EFL learning is bi-directional in nature. In addition to conceptualizing the direct impact of domain-specific determinants of communication proficiency, internal classroom conditions and external college facilities were assessed for possible moderating effects. Using a sample of college students in twelve different campus locations from Institut Kemahiran Mara (IKM), across Malaysia, the authors performed a regression analysis to empirically test the proposed research hypotheses. All constructs demonstrated low levels of multicollinearity and measurement scales indicated sufficient reliability and validity. Results show that teacher's personality is an important determinant of student proficiency in English. Monitoring efforts, however, did not have a direct influence on English proficiency but coupled with teacher's personality and college facilities, respectively, the coefficient interaction effects became significant. The results also reveal that classroom conditions do not interact with teacher's personality to improve student learning outcomes, nonetheless acts more predominantly as a predictor that directly enhances students' learning. Important research implications and future research directions are suggested.

Keywords: collaborative interaction; communication proficiency; learning environment; teacher characteristic; moderating effects

INTRODUCTION

There is a considerable amount of research in educational literature to support the view that teachers have a significant impact on students' learning and achievement (e.g., Danielson, 2002; Goldhaber, 2002; Sadeghi & Nikou, 2012). Surprisingly, however, the effects of

teacher characteristics on students' communication proficiency in the context of English learning and acquisition have not received much attention among scholars (Moncada & Ortiz, 2003; Borg, 2007). In the same vein, Akbari and Allvar (2010, p. 1) state that "little if any empirical evidence exists to enable us to determine which set of English as foreign language teacher characteristics correlate with positive student learning outcomes." English as a foreign language (EFL) refers to students learning English in a native-language speaking country, such as learning English in Korea, Thailand, and Malaysia.

It is reasonable for teachers to expect students to display a certain level of English proficiency at the end of the course, but this is only one of the goals of learning. Rather, the interactive or interpersonal qualities of the teacher and environments that inspire students' engagement create actual meaning to the whole teaching-learning exercise (Fraser, 1986; Akbari & Allvar, 2010). Previous studies have clearly demonstrated that understanding the humane characteristics of a teacher is highly relevant to English language learning (Gibbons, 2003; Zhang & Watkins, 2007). Educational administrators are increasingly searching for relevant information and methods to establish teacher-student engagements as such collaborative interactions provide an ideal environment for EFL learning (Gibbons, 2003).

The personality of the teacher and monitoring efforts are prominent teacher characteristics central to interactional mechanisms in language learning (see Zhang & Watkins, 2007) but have not been adequately understood. An enhanced understanding of teacher's personality and monitoring is a pertinent issue because teachers often have difficulty creating a positive EFL learning atmosphere (Faltis & Hudelson, 1994). While there has been considerable discussion on the importance of teacher personality traits and monitoring in general, little progress has been made in examining how these critical elements affect EFL student learning. Additional research is needed to explore the topic in greater depth. Moreover, the effects of teacher-student intellectual interactions may be contingent on environmental learning factors such as physical classroom conditions and amenities. Thus, our study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does teacher's personality affect EFL student learning outcomes?
- 2) Would intensive teacher monitoring enable students with a disadvantaged English background improve in the subject?
- 3) How does the outcome of teacher's personality in EFL student learning vary based on monitoring efforts?
- 4) How do the critical antecedents of communication proficiency vary based on internal (classroom conditions) and external (college facilities) learning environments?

This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap and address the questions above through empirical assessment of hypotheses. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which teacher's personality, monitoring efforts, and environmental learning factors influence students' communication skills. This study is unique from the literature on EFL learning in that, we focus on humanistic traits and evaluative commitments that embody teacher-student interactive engagements. In this way, we provide new insights to the existing literature. This paper also contributes theoretically towards an explanation of how English learning can be enhanced further from a contingency perspective. To this end, very few studies if any, have adopted a contingency approach combining internal and external environmental contexts in a single analysis. From an analytical perspective, the present study examines overall English proficiency with a multidimensional scale covering a range of discrete communication proficiency indicators, hence increasing the precision of our results. We hope our findings will assist educational administrators, teachers, and academicians to better understand the interplay between EFL teaching and learning.

A sample of college students from Mara Skills Institute (IKM) in twelve different campus locations was selected throughout Malaysia. IKM's corporate mission is to elevate the dignity of Malaysian ethnic and indigenous groups through structured educational programs. The institute acts as an agent for educational training that specializes on technical abilities to cater for the various fields in the commercial and industrial sectors in Malaysia. To achieve these targets, IKM believes English language is a tool that enhances student communication skills and competency. Bridging programs with local universities are in place, particularly for students who are unable to make it abroad. However, despite efforts to secure the future of prospective students, there had been increasing concerns at university level regarding English literacy, particularly among newly enrolled students (Rosniah, 2006). There were intense debates and concerns on how to improve the standard of English communication proficiency, not only at IKM but across all academic levels in the country (see Normazidah, Lie & Hazita, 2012). The current paper attempts to elucidate the issue at hand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we provide an overview of our main research variables and address related concepts pertaining to teacher characteristics, interpersonal traits of a good teacher, and environmental factors essential to student learning. We then briefly discuss student communication proficiency in English which is the outcome variable in this study.

Prior research on EFL teacher characteristics has focused predominantly on identifying the essential qualities of teachers that could influence students' learning. Moncada and Ortiz (2000) suggested that EFL teachers should be able to interact with students, have sufficient knowledge about pedagogical and learning principles, be prepared to teach in diverse student backgrounds, and observe classroom dynamics. An exploratory study by Zhang and Watkins (2007) revealed several attributes of a good EFL teacher, which include high levels of discipline, ability to cope with diversity, displaying positive behavior, possess strong pedagogical knowledge, being practical in teaching, ability to interact with students, and ability to focus on students' intellectual development. Similarly, a synthesis of EFL teaching by Patricia, Julie, and Anne (2005) revealed that students' learning was influenced by teachers who displayed excellent teaching skills, had sound knowledge about language teaching, and were able to engage students' families, and were able to provide effective instructions. Another study (Yihong et al., 2007) indicated that students' development and self-confidence in learning were influenced by the teacher's attitude.

Approaches in teaching foreign language from the Western perspective have been concerned with teacher characteristics in general (e.g., arousing students' interest, using effective teaching methods and materials, and organizing language activities) but often overlook the human aspect of teaching such as supportive and caring atmosphere, academic competence, good personal qualities, morality, and facilitating student learning (see Zhang & Watkins, 2007). In short, educating EFL students can be very demanding; teachers need to be competent in teaching and at the same time possess a set of attractive personal qualities to ensure effective student learning.

Teacher's personality refers to inner-qualities of a teacher, observed from the teacher's expression of values, beliefs, behavior, and attitude (Sronge, Tucker & Hindman, 2004). There are several key indicators associated with virtuous teacher personality. Effective personal qualities include being caring, fair and respectful, having positive attitude towards the teaching profession, participating in social interactions with students, being sincere, and practicing reflective teaching. Building awareness regarding the importance of such values is the first step in teaching (Sronge, Tucker & Hindman, 2004), which may motivate students

motivation to learn. Therefore, we assume that attractive teacher personality, apart from teaching techniques and materials, is critical to EFL learning. Nonetheless, as we have mentioned earlier, there has been a lack of empirical studies investigating the subject matter.

Monitoring efforts is defined as instructional activities provided by the teacher to keep track of students' understanding of the subject being taught (Natriello, 1987). The purpose of such assessment is to provide feedback on the progress of students along with instructions on how students can achieve specific learning goals. Monitoring generally involves the following interpersonal behaviors: questioning students during classroom discussions, one-to-one interaction with students, assigning and correcting homework, overseeing group activities, recording students' progress, or reviewing their performance (Natriello, 1987). Teacher monitoring skill has been established as a critical component of high-quality education. For instance, Akbari and Allvar (2010) state that, besides merely covering the course syllabus, instructional strategies are needed to ensure that students are on track and to enhance learning outcomes.

Classroom condition refers to the physical atmosphere of the classroom and availability of equipment and technology that support educational delivery (Fraser, 1986). Studies have shown that good ventilation, lighting, and small but comfortable classrooms are important for student learning (e.g., Lackney, 1999; Schneider, 2002). EFL teachers are normally expected to use technology for information search and to improve communication abilities. In short, while human factors are important, the classrooms condition is critical for effective teacher-student communication. Fraser (1986) argues that classroom environment is central to student learning and should not be ignored by those who aspire to improve the effectiveness of teaching.

College facilities refer to amenities provided by the educational institution to create a healthy environment, conducive to students' well-being and learning (Schneider, 2002). College facilities include buildings, library, eating facilities, play fields, and housing. These physical conveniences are put in place to promote sustainable education whilst fostering students' social interactions, curricular activities, safety, health, and recreation.

English communication proficiency is defined as the ability of a student to acquire the skills to read, speak, listen, and write in English (Cohen, 1990). For decades, the four distinct communication skills have been generally accepted as an integral component to understanding and improving the quality of English language education. Sadeghi and Nikou (2012, p. 167) claimed that "there is great emphasis on learning the four skills of English in most foreign language contexts". In fact, there has to be equal emphasis on each communication element for effective teaching, thus they should be covered in the course curriculum (Nation, 2009). In an effort to learn and acquire English, many students aim for pragmatic (e.g., good results) rather than humanistic (e.g., communal blending) goals (Hong & Leavell, 2006). This may, in part, account for why many students in non-Western cultures feel that it is difficult to acquire the language.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

We draw largely on social constructivism theory which asserts that language learning is a response to interactions with social and environmental stimuli (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theory, originated in part from the perspective of Vygotsky (1978), assumes language learning and acquisition as a social development process that is achieved through collaborative interaction-based activities between the teacher and student (see Gibbons, 2003). The ultimate goal is to transfer knowledge and control to students. The teacher effectiveness paradigm illuminates the role of teacher-student interactions comprising three dimensions that can be regulated by the individual teacher: professional characteristics,

teaching skills, and creating a classroom climate (for reviews, see Zhang & Watkins, 2007). Gibbons (2003, p. 250) elaborated on the sociocultural theory in the context of EFL learning and asserted that students “have to learn to use language for a range of purposes and in a range of cultural and situational context.” This interpretation focuses on how students can improve language learning—in addition to constant interaction with teachers in a typical English classroom, students need to be exposed to a wider social setting so they can observe actual patterns in language use and experience how English is applied in the real world.

Wilson and Peterson (2006) elaborated on the fundamental theories of learning and teaching and concluded that efforts to understand the link between the two have been modest. They explained why the relationship remains elusive: 1) research on learning and teaching has been treated independently of one another, leading to two common groups of researchers, those who work on learning and those who work on teaching; and 2) student learning “depends” on many factors that are beyond the teacher’s control. For example, are the classroom and college conditions conducive to learning?

In view of the above discussion, we propose a conceptual model that links teaching with student learning in an EFL context. As depicted in Figure 1, the model postulates that teacher’s personality and monitoring efforts (social engagements) are important determinants of English communication proficiency. The model also shows that monitoring indirectly affects the relationship between teacher’s personality and student communication skills. Classroom conditions (internal environment) and college facilities (external environment) are incorporated in the model to examine possible moderating effects. The succeeding paragraphs outline our research hypotheses.

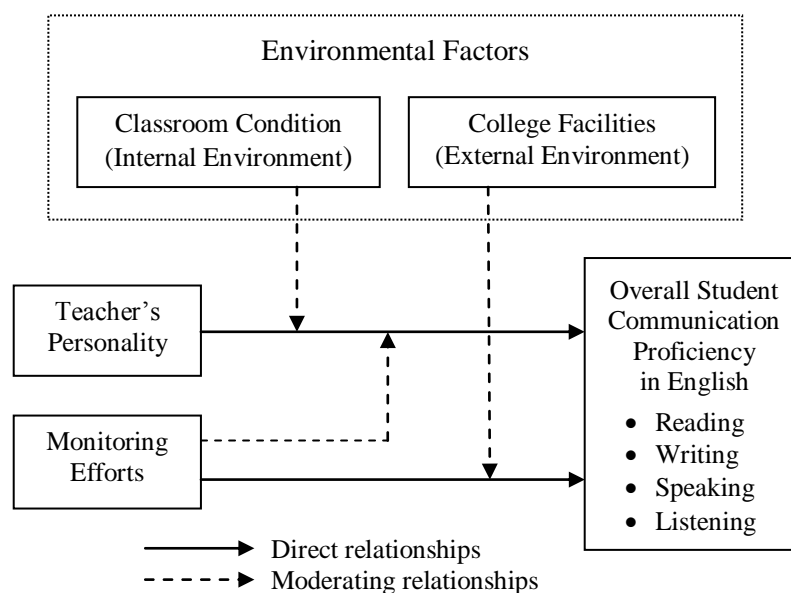


FIGURE 1. Conceptual model of the direct and moderating relationships examined in this study

PERSONALITY AS DETERMINANTS OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Effective teachers demonstrate respect to students in a variety of ways, from their personalized treatments to how they work with students’ families. Respectful teachers know their students by name, value each individual’s ability, and are aware of student’s frame of mind (Schneider, 2002). All these inner-qualities of a teacher portray a delightful personality that encourages students’ engagement and intellectual relationships. We believe that social bonding between teachers and students play an important role in developing a positive learning atmosphere. This is particularly important for English language classes as students

may experience the feeling of anxiety such as fear of undesirable evaluations by the teacher and fear of what others might think of them.

We know that the most effective teachers are passionate about their profession and students' well-being (Schneider, 2002; Sronge, Tucker & Hindman, 2004). Accordingly, we predict that student learning increases when they are taught by English teachers who not only possess the knowledge and teaching skills, but also show compassion for their students. Since the personality of a teacher, pleasing or otherwise, affects students' feelings and actions, it is indeed a critical factor that may contribute significantly towards student learning. Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₁: Teacher's personality will be positively related to student communication proficiency in English.

MONITORING AS DETERMINANTS OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Effective teachers do more than test their students; they monitor and collect evidence of students' level of understanding. Monitoring student progress means that teachers interact with students constantly to track student learning and inform them of their progress. Our research on this quality focuses on supervising student's progress, responding to student needs, and giving out homework assignments. According to Danielson (2002), homework needs to be assigned so students can learn to be independent, outside the normal classroom teaching hours. Moreover, teachers who spend more time monitoring their students will likely take responsible for their students' progress and may view learning difficulties or disadvantages as a thrust for greater efforts to improve learning outcomes.

Teachers should vigilantly monitor students' tasks so that they match the learning objectives and desired instructional outcomes. Teachers use assessments as part of the instructional process. They continue to monitor and adjust instructions to facilitate their students using a variety of assignments and observations. This is especially important in learning English as students need to make conscious efforts to produce the sounds of the new language, which involve in different motions of the lips, tongue, and other speech organs. Learning to make the right motions will require a good deal of time and practice. Therefore, we derive the following:

H₂: Teacher's monitoring efforts will be positively related to student communication proficiency in English.

MODERATING EFFECT OF MONITORING EFFORTS

Some teachers are excellent in teaching but may lack extended efforts to monitor their students' progress, and vice versa. It is reasonable to assume that attractive personal qualities and monitoring skills, if put into practice together, will propel student learning to new heights. This is relevant to English learning as students not only have to be interested and motivated in the subject (i.e., can be inspired by the teacher's personality), but also need confidence and perseverance to uplift communications skills to higher levels (i.e., can be achieved with consistent monitoring).

An important question one might ask of a student is, why learn a foreign language? If we know the students' reasons for learning English (compassion for students), then we could get a better understanding of their goals in learning, and consequently, how best to direct their learning in the classroom (Marzano, Pickering & McTighe, 1993). This may also imply that teaching has to go beyond being teacher-centered and ultimately should engage in learner-centered orientations. We predict that the impact on student learning will be enhanced

when students are taught by teachers who combine their humanistic qualities with continual supervision. Based on this argument, we present the following relationship:

H₃: The relationship between teacher's personality and student communication proficiency in English will be strengthened with greater monitoring efforts by the teacher.

MODERATING EFFECT OF CLASSROOM CONDITION

One of the most important elements of in-class teaching environment is class size. Research linking class size has been controversial, although there is a growing consensus that students in smaller classes learn better. Hoxby (2000) used naturally occurring variation in class sizes and found that class size has no effect on students' achievements. On the contrary, Ferguson (1991) found a significant relationship between smaller class sizes and student achievement. Molnar et al. (1999) concluded that teachers can perform better in smaller classes as students become more disciplined. Since there has not been any consensus on the outcome of class size, we believe that by conceptualizing classroom environments (including number of student and classroom space, among others) as a moderator variable, the teacher personality–communication proficiency link can be better understood.

Another important aspect of the classroom is temperature levels. Lowe (1990) found that classroom temperature is central to the performance of both teachers and students. In addition to class size and temperature, the availability of teaching equipment (e.g., sound system, visual aid, internet connection, etc.) in an English language classroom is essential for effective delivery and student learning. In summary, uncomfortable and inefficient classroom conditions may degrade a teacher's mood and capabilities to teach, affecting personality and students' learning outcomes. It is therefore reasonable to expect that the personality of teachers along varying quality levels of classroom conditions could impact on English learning. Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H₄: The relationship between teacher's personality and student communication proficiency in English will be strengthened with more conducive classroom conditions.

MODERATING EFFECT OF COLLEGE FACILITIES

Although there has been evidence of the impact of campus facilities on a number of variables including educational process, attendance, and discipline (e.g., Lackney, 1999; Schneider, 2002), we still do not know whether college facilities interact significantly with monitoring to produce positive learning outcomes. Monitoring students' progress normally involves assigning homework and group activities outside the classroom (Sadeghi & Nikou, 2012). This implies that external class factors should play a critical role on how students learn and interact with their colleagues. In fact, a recent study by Normazidah, Lie, and Hazita (2012, p. 45) state that "It is important to look beyond the language classrooms in order to understand the position of English literacy to the learners."

Since English learning has to be practiced beyond class hours, convenient facilities (e.g., library and study area, place for group discussions, efficient transportation, student union hall, resources for curricular activities, comfortable hostel, etc.) are critical to student learning. English language learning and monitoring demands a great deal of social interaction with teachers and colleagues. Such behavior can be harmonized with convenient facilities that foster communal blending (especially with international students) and interactive conversation, which in turn should result in enhanced English communication literacy. We

make an attempt to examine whether college facilities have a positive impact on the monitoring–English proficiency relationship. Formally, we predict that:

H₅: The relationship between teacher's monitoring efforts and student communication proficiency in English will be strengthened with better-equipped college facilities.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study is to predict the extent to which teacher characteristics and environmental learning factors influence students' communication skills. This study employs a quantitative research design to gain a better understanding of the direct (determinants) and indirect (moderators) linkages that influence students' English proficiency. According to Oxford (1996), apart from enabling variable relationships to be assessed, a quantitative method is appropriate for language learning research as the use of survey questionnaire is nonthreatening to the respondents (ensures confidentiality) and free of social desirability response bias (responding in a way that the researcher wants students to answer).

RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND SAMPLE SELECTION

We chose college students from IKM as our empirical setting. Four hundred students were randomly selected from IKM's general student list to participate in the study. To minimize sampling error, the respondents were selected via a systematic sampling technique. Specifically, the students in the sample frame were numbered in descending order and an initial starting point was selected by a random process. A skip interval was used to select each sample member. This procedure was necessary so that the entire list was covered regardless of the starting point.

A structured questionnaire was developed containing items relating to the variables being identified in this study. Students normally have to show adequate English communication proficiency to enter higher learning institutions, but at IKM, passing the language is not a requirement. Therefore, to avoid any possible misinterpretations, we translated the questionnaire into Malay and pre-tested the questionnaire with several students to establish content and face validity, ease of reading, structure, and comprehension. Additionally, an in-depth interview was conducted with academics and experts in the area to finalize the questionnaire.

To secure the credibility of information, a selection criterion was imposed for the sample population, whereby only students from semester two to four were eligible for the survey. This procedure ensured that all participants had taken and completed an English course, hence they could respond accordingly to the survey questions.

Questionnaires were distributed to students of IKM in twelve campus locations across Malaysia. A cover letter was attached to the questionnaire to notify the objective and significance of the study. Respondents were also assured confidentiality and anonymity and that only aggregated responses would be reported. As respondents needed some time and space to complete their answers, the questionnaires were distributed and collected in one week. Questionnaires were circulated to students by their head teachers (intended to stimulate response rate) and of the 325 self-administered questionnaires returned, 318 were usable, for an effective response rate of 79%.

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

The moderated regression analysis from the SPSS software (version 16.0) was used to examine the relationship between variables. The regression coefficients were clustered into three groups: control variable effects, direct effects, and moderating effects. This enabled us to systematically estimate the relationship patterns that exist among the variables within the present framework.

MEASURES AND VALIDATION

Table 1 presents an overview of the research items and variables used in our questionnaire. We used the questions developed by Sronge, Tucker, and Hindman (2004) to assess teacher's personality. Respondents were asked to answer a few questions regarding their English teacher's personality such as ability to understand the student's learning problems, concerns for the student, knowledge about the individual student, and attitude towards teaching. Responses were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

To measure monitoring efforts, respondents were asked to answer five questions. Most of the questions were taken from Natriello (1987) which tapped on responsiveness to student needs, listening attentively to questions and comments, always providing homework and group assignments, and keeping track of the student's progress. Responses were on a five-point disagree/agree scale.

To assess students' communicative proficiency in English, we used four items as suggested by Cohen (1990) which tapped on reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities. Students who show proficient communication development in English may not necessarily register higher academic scores in English and may still have difficulty understanding the subject (Cummins, 2000). Following Oxford and Shearin's (1994) recommendation, rather than using the conventional student achievement scores as a measure of communication proficiency, we focused on students' perceptions of their learning progress. Respondents were asked to assess their English communication performance at the end of an English course on a five-point scale ranging from 'no improvement at all' to 'improved very much'.

Classroom condition was operationalized by asking respondents to indicate the ergonomics and physical conditions of the classroom. Six questions were posed to respondents, tapping on class size, table and chair condition, cleanliness, ventilation, technology and equipment, and classroom space. Most of the measures were adapted from Fraser (1986), on a five-point disagree/agree scale.

As for college facilities, five questions were posed to respondents. The questions concentrate on the facilities provided by their campus college including transportation, library and study area, food courts, student housing, and resources for students' curricular activities. The responses were on a five-point disagree/agree scale from items proposed by Schneider (2002).

The demographics and other related variables that may influence communication proficiency in English were also included in the analysis as *control variables*. These comprise gender, semester in college, overall grade, and whether or not students use English during their leisure time. The controls occupied a nominal scale format, hence were not subjected to reliability and validity tests.

The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) of the measures are as follows: teacher's personality (.72); monitoring efforts (.78); classroom condition (.80); college facilities (.81); and students' communicative proficiency in English (.87). The scores imply that the constructs are reliable (>.70) as suggested by Hair et al. (2006). All multiple-item measures were examined for internal consistency using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

via AMOS version 18. As expected, all items loaded significantly ($p < .01$) on their respective constructs, surpassing the .60 cut-off point suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Results from CFA fit indices revealed that the model fits the data reasonably well: $\chi^2 = 107.16$ ($p = .000$); d.f. = 62; $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 1.73$; NFI = .90; CFI = .93; and RMSEA = .07. These results provide sufficient evidence of reliability, validity, and unidimensionality of measures; hence the data is fit for regression analysis. The Cronbach's Alpha scores for the research variables and item factor loadings (standardized) are displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Construct measurement summary

Research variable and item description	Factor loadings
<i>Teacher's Personality</i> ^a ($\alpha = .72$)	
1. The teacher understands my English learning problems and abilities	.75
2. The teacher puts an effort to know me personally	.62
3. The teacher is always concerned for me	.65
4. The teacher seems very sincere in teaching	.65
<i>Monitoring Efforts</i> ^a ($\alpha = .78$)	
1. The teacher has always been responsive to my learning progress	.80
2. The teacher listens attentively to my questions and comments	.84
3. The teacher continually monitors my English performance	.72
4. The teacher provides homework and groups assignments	.70
5. The teacher keeps track of my English progress in a log book	.76
<i>Classroom Condition</i> ^a ($\alpha = .80$)	
1. Comfortable chairs and tables	.61
2. Equipped with latest technology to assist teaching and learning	.63
3. Class is clean and well maintained	.63
4. Good air ventilation and temperature	.79
5. Large classroom space	.77
6. Not too many students in class	.72
<i>College Facilities</i> ^a ($\alpha = .81$)	
1. The library is convenient for study and student discussions	.60
2. Transportation service is efficient	.62
3. Student residence is clean and satisfactory	.79
4. The college provides attractive cafés/food courts to socialize	.72
5. Physical space and resources are provided for my curricular activities	.72
<i>Communication Proficiency in English</i> ^b ($\alpha = .87$)	
1. My ability to read in English	.87
2. My ability to write in English	.86
3. My ability to speak in English	.80
4. My ability to listen in English	.66

Notes: ^aConstruct was measured with a five-point scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

^bConstruct was measured with a five-point scale: 1 = no improvement at all, 5 = improve very much.

RESULTS

The data were coded and analyzed with SPSS. Most of the respondents were male, comprising 62.2% of the total sample. Majority of respondents were in the second semester, contributing 75.4% of the sample. Approximately 85% of the sampled students do not converse in English in their leisure time. Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviation, and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 2. All constructs demonstrated acceptable levels of collinearity ($<.90$) as recommended by Hair et al. (2006).

TABLE 2. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Mean	3.70	1.19	6.73	2.23	1.79	3.39	3.95	3.69	2.78
Standard deviation	0.73	0.38	2.12	0.44	0.41	0.80	0.67	0.79	0.98
1. Proficiency	1.00								
2. Gender	-.08	1.00							
3. Grade	-.45**	.01	1.00						
4. Semester	-.04	-.24**	.24**	1.00					
5. Usage	-.36**	.24**	.34**	-.01	1.00				
6. Personality	.35**	-.03	-.39**	-.15	-.33**	1.00			
7. Monitoring	.18*	-.02	-.08	-.06	-.07	.57**	1.00		
8. Class condition	.33**	-.10	-.09	.12	-.11	.47**	.56**	1.00	
9. Facilities	.06	-.05	.10	.13	.02	.37**	.26**	.50**	100

* $p < .05$ (one-tailed); ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed)

TABLE 3. Results of regression analysis (standardized coefficients)
 Dependent variable: proficiency in English

Independent Variables	Proficiency in English	
	β	t
<i>Control Variables</i>		
Gender	-.035	-.428
Grade	.248	2.673***
Semester	.065	.741
Usage (0 = No, 1 = Yes)	.208	2.384**
<i>Direct Effects</i>		
Teacher's personality (H_1)	.310	2.622***
Monitoring efforts (H_2)	.083	.722
Classroom condition	.172	1.549*
College facilities	-.122	-1.211
<i>Moderating Effects</i>		
Monitoring efforts \times Teacher's personality (H_3)	.250	2.691***
Classroom condition \times Teacher's personality (H_4)	-.112	-1.135
College facilities \times Monitoring efforts (H_5)	.364	3.608***
R^2	.484	
Adjusted R^2	.424	
F value	8.052***	

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$

Table 3 displays the regression results that are used to test H_1 through H_5 . The R^2 and adjusted R^2 are .484 and .424 respectively. This indicates that 48% of the total variance in student communication proficiency is explained by the independent and moderator variables. Hypotheses 1 and 2 predict that teacher-specific variables; personality and monitoring efforts, respectively, would have a positive impact on students' communicative proficiency in English. Based on the results in Table 3, teacher's personality emerged as an important determinant of students' English communication proficiency. The relationship shows a significant positive direction ($\beta = .310$, $t = 2.622$, $p < .01$), hence H_1 receives support. On the other hand, we did not find support for the effects of teacher's monitoring efforts on English proficiency ($\beta = .083$, $t = .722$, not significant since $p > .10$), thus H_2 is rejected. Hypothesis 3 proposes that monitoring efforts will strengthen the relationship between teacher's

personality and student English proficiency. Results indicate that monitoring efforts interacted with teacher's personality and had an effect on English communicative proficiency ($\beta = .250$, $t = 2.691$, $p < .01$). The coefficients are in the hypothesized direction (i.e., interaction effect is positive and significant), hence H_3 is supported.

According to hypotheses 4 and 5, we predicted that comfortable classroom conditions and college facilities, respectively, will strengthen the relationship between the domain-specific determinants and student proficiency in English. Results indicate that interaction terms between teacher's personality and classroom condition was not significantly related to proficiency in English ($\beta = -.112$, $t = -1.135$, not significant since $p > .10$), failing to provide support for H_4 . However, college facilities interacted with monitoring efforts and had a significant positive effect on students' English proficiency ($\beta = .364$, $t = 3.608$, $p < .01$). Specifically, the interaction coefficient (positive direction) indicates that monitoring efforts associates more positively with student learning achievements when college facilities are favorable. Thus, H_5 is supported.

With reference to control effects (not hypothesized), students' overall grade ($\beta = .248$, $t = 2.673$, $p < .01$) and usage of English during leisure time ($\beta = .208$, $t = 2.384$, $p < .05$) are significant and positively correlated with English communication proficiency, while gender ($\beta = -.035$, $t = -.428$, $p > .10$) and semester of enrollment or seniority ($\beta = .065$, $t = .741$, $p > .10$) are not significant.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings notwithstanding, it is important to note that we do not infer any cause-and-effect relationship between constructs, but deal purely with influences. Several important insights and implications can be drawn from this study. Firstly, we found that there was a direct and significant positive relationship between teacher's personality and students' communication proficiency in English. This is a critical finding as it supports the concept of mediation through teacher interactions with students in the context of English learning (Gibbons, 2003). This shows that if English teachers are passionate about their students' learning and well-being (i.e., active participants) they are able to produce students who are proficient in English. This also indicates that apart from teaching skills, the psychological aspect of teaching is critical to the learning process. In fact, more often than not, when students are asked about their best teachers, they will describe how the teacher made them feel before mentioning how much they learned. As our findings show, teacher's personality is central to English learning. Teachers should therefore focus their efforts to portray delightful qualities such as integrity, respect, compassion, and sensitivity to students' need as these values essentially creates motivation to learn. From the institutional perspective, administrators should account for 'humanistic qualities' of a teacher in addition to educational qualifications, particularly in the course of employment and job promotions.

Secondly, further analysis revealed no direct relationship between monitoring efforts and students' communication proficiency in English. This result was unexpected because, based on logical reasoning, teacher's monitoring efforts should play an important role in student learning. Perhaps the majority of students that participated in the survey felt uneasy to be closely monitored by teachers due to the fear of communicating in English, hence did not act as a predictor variable to enhancing English language achievements. Students may also have high levels of communication anxiety, especially when they are required to interact verbally (necessary in the monitoring process) with their teachers. Moreover, a recent study by Noor Hashimah (2007) provided evidence that majority of students at tertiary education in Malaysia have difficulty expressing themselves in English and are very nervous when asked to converse in the language. Since this is particularly widespread in Malaysia and other Asian

cultures, special training courses or workshops should be initiated to understand and overcome the anxieties that foreign language learners may experience.

Thirdly, we examined whether evaluative or monitoring efforts strengthen the teacher's personality–communication proficiency relationship. The finding indicates that such relationships do exist and was highly significant on the English learning outcome. This finding is very interesting as initial results (Hypothesis 2) suggest that monitoring *per se* does not have an impact on English learning, but has to be coupled with the teacher's personality to produce effective teaching results. This finding seems to correspond with the findings about essential teacher qualities expected by students (e.g., Havita, 2000), including superior teaching attributes and effective instructions (i.e., the ability to help students understand new concepts and foster intellectual development). As such, we can conclude that highly effective English teachers are those who possess both qualities at once; a delightful personality and equipped with brilliant supervisory skills. This finding also hints to the solution for anxiety discussed in the earlier paragraph. However, extended work is needed to confirm whether interaction between teacher's personality and monitoring leads to reduction in English language anxiety.

Fourthly, results revealed that the quality of classroom did not have a moderating effect on the relationship between teacher's personality and proficiency in English. Nevertheless, after closely examining the regression results, we found that classroom condition has a significant and *direct* positive effect on students' communicative proficiency in English ($\beta = .172$, $t = 1.549$, $p < .10$: see Table 3). Part of the questions relating to classroom condition was based on class sizes. This strengthens the findings on the importance of having a smaller class size by Ferguson (1991) who found that class size has a direct impact on student achievement gains. As mentioned earlier, studies have shown that the quality of air, lighting, and smaller classrooms play a role on student learning (e.g., Lackney, 1999; Schneider, 2002). Based on our findings, we can infer that classroom condition acts stronger as a *predictor variable*, independently on its own, rather than as a moderator to EFL student learning outcomes. Educational institutions with English-medium or curriculum should pay closer attention to managing the number of students in class, provide adequate technology to assist teaching and learning, and ensure classrooms are comfortable for students.

Fifthly, the moderating effect of college facilities and monitoring was in line with the predicted relationship. This is a crucial finding because previously, as stated a few times earlier, teacher monitoring has no direct effect on students' communication proficiency in English. We found that college facilities together with monitoring efforts by teachers are an essential ingredient to student achievements. This suggests that education is not confined to human interactions and outcomes; it encompasses physical surroundings that can elevate intellectual excitement and learning. This finding reinforces Wilson and Peterson's (2006) assertion that teaching effectiveness is dependent on the students' environmental learning contexts. This finding should draw educational administrators' attention to the importance of providing convenient and fully-equipped facilities conducive to student learning. In summary, although the individual teacher is critical to student success, the physical aspects of the campus as well as classroom conveniences are essential to English language acquisition and therefore need to evolve in tandem with the progress of EFL education.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study has several limitations that can be addressed in future research. Although the present sample is sufficient for exploratory research, further research should aim for a larger sample size. This will allow for greater statistical precision and generalizations to be made.

While the emphasis on IKM students enabled us to control possible sampling effects, it restricts the generalizability of our findings. Moreover, the data on teacher characteristics and communication proficiency were based on students' perception. Future research should consider using different sources of data to minimize method bias (e.g., teacher characteristics from the teachers' perspective, language development from actual performance scores and teacher's observations especially with reference to oral communication performance).

Our study is cross-sectional in nature, which means that time differences may alter our findings. We suggest future studies to consider a longitudinal research design with data from multiple institutions. We recommend comparing results from various higher learning institutes, not only within a given country but across several countries that feature EFL in their academic program. This will bring us closer to understanding cultural differences in foreign language education.

Further investigation comparing students' performances based on contact-hours in class and the use of specialized facilities (e.g., language labs) or methods (e.g., cognitive, affective) in English language learning may produce valuable insights. Future research should also look into other possible moderators or contexts that may affect English learning outcomes. Special events that encourage pervasive or collective social interactions such as motivational camps, industrial training, experiential learning programs, and international exchange programs provide fruitful areas for investigation. Researchers should also consider examining whether modern technology-based collaborative learning (i.e., mobile devices and e-learning programs) would stimulate EFL learning. Students may perceive such innovative learning to be more practical than conventional learning as students can practice rapid interaction without limitations in learning space and time.

In conclusion, teachers play a significant role in students' learning and intellectual development. Nonetheless, the education process constitutes multiple building blocks that contribute to student learning. Based on this judgment, we extend the notion that students' proficiency in English is bi-directional in nature. Although we found support for both direct and indirect effects on students' proficiency in English, further enquires linking to different sets of antecedents and moderators are needed to shed greater light on this matter.

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