



# Thai Science and Social Science Undergraduates’ Perceptions toward Effective English Language Teacher Characteristics

**Kanchana Cheewasukthaworn**

kanchana.c@rsu.ac.th, Rangsit English Language Institute, Rangsit University, Thailand

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Received 16/08/2024	<b>ABSTRACT</b>  This mixed-methods study investigated and compared the perceptions toward forty-five effective English language teacher characteristics of Thai undergraduates in science and social science programs at a private university. These characteristics were categorized into five categories: rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge and credibility, and organization and preparation. A total of 417 undergraduates (215 in science programs and 202 in social science programs) were purposively selected to participate. A 4-point rating scale questionnaire and focus group interviews were employed to collect data. Quantitative data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis. Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that the science and social science undergraduates had similar perceptions of effective English language teacher characteristics, although the independent samples t-test’s findings indicated some significant differences. Both groups identified rapport as crucial, with commonalities including high ratings for the teacher’s enthusiasm and low ratings for asking questions and randomly calling students to answer. The findings largely align with existing theories on
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	<p>effective English language teaching and offer practical insights for educators and administrators.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Thai EFL learners, perceptions, effective English language teacher characteristics, science and social science undergraduates</p>
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## Introduction

Language teachers play significant roles in learners' language learning achievement (Dinçer et al., 2013; Shojaei et al., 2021). Scholars in the field of language teaching (e.g., Harmer, 2015; Tajeddin & Griffiths, 2020) have discussed the characteristics of effective language teachers. Several studies have explored how EFL learners perceive the qualities of effective English language teachers (EELT). (e.g., Barnes & Lock, 2013; Shojaei et al., 2021; Zamani & Ahangari, 2016). In Thailand, research has also examined Thai EFL learners' views on EELT traits (Chanmanee, 2018; Chumworatayee, 2021; Meksophawannagul, 2015).

Despite this, there is a notable lack of research comparing perceptions of EELT characteristics between learners in different academic disciplines. In Thailand, English is still a compulsory course for undergraduates in both science and social science programs at most universities. However, little is known about how learners from these two academic disciplines perceive the EELT characteristics identified in previous studies. Additionally, different academic disciplines can influence learners to adopt different learning styles (Hu et al., 2021). Lau and Gardner (2019), for instance, found that natural science students tended to enjoy collaborative learning while social science students strongly believed in learner autonomy. The different learning styles may then affect these learners' perceptions of the EELT characteristics, causing them to hold different views of what makes an English teacher effective. Thus, it is worth exploring whether there is any difference in the perceptions toward the EELT characteristics of Thai undergraduates in science and social science programs.

Knowing what these undergraduates perceive as the EELT characteristics can help EFL teachers design and deliver their lessons in a way that can meet these students' needs as well as create a productive learning atmosphere (Meksophawannagul, 2015) which can contribute to the students' success in English language learning (Dinçer et al., 2013). Additionally, because science and social science undergraduates generally constitute the majority of students in many universities in Thailand, this study's findings could benefit both English language learners and teachers in tertiary

education, especially those in Thailand. Given the above facts, this study was conducted to investigate and compare the perceptions toward the EELT characteristics of Thai undergraduates in science and social science programs. Accordingly, the study's research questions were as follows:

(1) What are Thai undergraduates' perceptions of EELT characteristics in science and social science programs?

(2) How do Thai undergraduates in science and social science programs differ in their perceptions of EELT characteristics?

## Literature Review

### Effective English Language Teacher (EELT) Characteristics

**Table 1**

*Barnes and Lock's (2010) Taxonomy of EELT Attributes*

Attributes	Descriptions
Rapport	Being friendly, open, and accessible to students, having good relationships with students, understanding students' differences, having a positive attitude and a good sense of humor
Delivery	Being enthusiastic about teaching, using various teaching and learning activities, engaging students in lessons, correcting students' writing and speaking mistakes, adjusting their teaching styles to suit students' needs
Fairness	Treating all students fairly by giving attention to all students, grading students according to clear grading criteria, requiring students to work hard in class and do homework, preparing students for test or assessment
Knowledge and credibility	Being well qualified for and having sound content knowledge in English, especially grammar and vocabulary
Organization and preparation	Conducting teaching according to a syllabus, informing students of each lesson's objectives, being well-prepared for each class, producing and providing supplementary materials

Various scholarly works on the EELT characteristics consistently indicate that an effective English language teacher needs to possess numerous characteristics. For instance, Harmer (2015) posited that good English teachers must be knowledgeable of the English language, know how to teach it, and be passionate about their profession and students' learning success, including being creative, flexible, and fair to their students. Besides, DİNÇER et al. (2013) classified key EELT characteristics into four categories: socio-affective skills, pedagogical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge, and

teacher's characteristics. Additionally, Barnes and Lock (2010) proposed a taxonomy of EELT attributes based on the results of their qualitative investigation of Korean university students' perceptions toward the EELT attributes. This taxonomy is presented in Table 1.

A review of these frameworks which were based on analytical review and empirical research reveals considerable overlap. For instance, Harmer's (2015) emphasis on knowledge aligns with DİNÇER et al. (2013) on subject-matter knowledge and Barnes and Lock (2010) regarding knowledge and credibility. The overlap affirms that these frameworks are generally similar.

### **Other Desirable Characteristics for Effective English Language Teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Apart from theoretical frameworks on the characteristics of effective English language teachers, the exponential technological advancements in recent decades have led certain scholars to explore other characteristics needed for being effective English language teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among these scholars were Heredia-Arboleda et al. (2021) who suggested that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, effective EFL teachers should have four qualities: being lifelong learners who always expand their own and their students' knowledge; developing a good rapport with students to help and encourage students to learn both inside and outside the classroom; maintaining a good balance between their teaching practice and socialization with students; and being cross-cultural mediators who expose students to other cultures. Besides, Kereluik et al. (2013) made three suggestions for teachers and teacher educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, teachers still need to have sound content knowledge of the subject they teach. Second, teachers are required to have technological knowledge and know when and why they should use technology in their teaching. Third, teachers need to help their students acquire "cultural competence, emotional awareness, and leadership skills" (p. 133) which are necessary skills in the 21st century.

In conclusion, effective English language teachers are required to possess multiple characteristics as suggested by the scholarly works previously reviewed. They are also required to have technological and intercultural competence due to technological development and globalization. For the current study, Barnes and Lock's (2010) taxonomy is adopted as a guiding framework for three reasons: it was developed from the perceptions of Korean EFL learners who are similar to Thai students; it includes unique attributes such as speaking slowly and understanding students' backgrounds that were not found in other frameworks; and it has been validated through subsequent research, including Chumworatayee's (2021) use of the questionnaire that was developed from the taxonomy in the Thai context.

Besides, technological and intercultural competence was added to make this guiding framework more comprehensive and up-to-date. The combination between taxonomy and competence was reflected in the study's data collection instruments.

## **Studies on Effective English Language Teacher Characteristics**

So far, several empirical studies have been conducted based on the above theoretical propositions to explore learners' perceptions of the EELT characteristics in both non-Thai and Thai contexts. Some of these studies were reviewed below.

### ***Studies in Non-Thai Contexts***

In 2013, Barnes and Lock investigated Korean university students' perceptions toward effective foreign language teacher attributes by using a 7-point rating questionnaire which had been developed from their 2010 EELT attribute taxonomy. Among the five categories in the taxonomy, delivery was perceived by the students as the most important category, followed by knowledge and credibility, rapport, organization and preparation, and fairness, respectively.

Based on their quantitative study using a four-point rating scale questionnaire as a data collection instrument, Zamani and Ahangari (2016) identified relationship-building, self-confidence, and class management as crucial traits for EFL teachers in the eyes of 60 Iranian students. Additionally, Said (2017), who used both questionnaires and interviews as data collection instruments, reported that Indonesian students perceived EFL teachers' use of active learning, clear communication of learning goals, and prompt feedback as behaviors that facilitated their English language learning.

More recently, Ngo (2022) investigated Vietnamese EFL non-English major undergraduates' perceptions of how the pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles of teachers affected their online learning engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using four focus group discussions with 20 students, Ngo found that in online classes, a dictatorial teaching style could negatively impact students' learning engagement while the teacher's friendliness and enthusiasm could help create a safe and positive online learning environment, thereby promoting student engagement. Additionally, teacher technological competence was found to support students' engagement. Similarly, Kundra et al. (2023) examined university students' perceptions of an ideal English teacher before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a close-ended questionnaire with 84 and 80 students at an Indian university. The findings showed that the pandemic had

a considerable impact on these perceptions. While teacher-student interaction remained important throughout, traits such as emotional sensitivity, flexibility, accessibility outside class, and technological competence became more crucial during the pandemic.

### ***Studies in the Thai Context***

In Thailand, Meksophawannagul (2015) investigated the characteristics of effective EFL teachers and learners as viewed by 35 Thai EFL teachers and 613 EFL engineering students at a university with questionnaires. This study revealed that the teachers valued organization and preparation as the most important EELT category while the learners emphasized rapport. Similarly, Chanmanee (2018) conducted a study to discover the EELT characteristics according to the perceptions of 25 teachers and 169 students at one high school in Thailand. The data, collected via questionnaire and semi-structured interview, illustrated that while the teachers considered socio-affective skills the most important, pedagogical knowledge was viewed as the most important characteristic by the students.

Besides the above studies which explored the perceptions of both teachers and students, other studies were conducted to investigate Thai EFL students' perceptions toward the EELT characteristics. For instance, Chumworatayee (2021) explored the perceptions of Thai undergraduates and graduates toward the EELT attributes by using Barnes and Lock's (2013) questionnaire. Interestingly, both groups of students similarly viewed rapport as the most important category, followed by organization and preparation while delivery was rated as the least important category by both groups. More recently, Wangdi and Shimray (2022) investigated Thai university students' perceptions of EELT qualities. Using the data collection method called photovoice which "allows individual researchers to uncover a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives of community through a specific photographic technique" (Wangdi & Shimray, 2022, p. 810), the researchers found that classroom instructional skills, mastery of English knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills were the four qualities viewed by their participants as essential EELT characteristics.

While many studies agree on the importance of rapport and delivery, findings vary across contexts, underscoring the need for context-specific investigations. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of EELT characteristics by exploring perceptions among Thai undergraduates in science and social science programs, addressing a notable gap in the literature.

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## Methodology

### Research Design

This study was designed as explanatory sequential mixed-methods research in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In this study, quantitative data were first collected via a questionnaire to provide an overview of the participants' perceptions toward the EELT characteristics. Subsequently, qualitative data were collected via focus group interviews to elucidate and expand upon the quantitative findings. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data is believed to provide a holistic understanding of the participants' perceptions of the EELT characteristics by integrating both data types, where qualitative data help explain and interpret the quantitative findings.

### Participants

The population of this study was undergraduates at a private university in Thailand. These students were required to take two compulsory English courses. Both courses were integrated four-skill classes focusing on general English communication, targeting CEFR levels B1 and B1+, respectively. The students normally take the first course in the summer term and the second course in the first term of each academic year. This study was conducted in the first term of the academic year 2022; thus, the participants were drawn from approximately 7,000 students taking the second compulsory English course at that time via a purposive sampling method to ensure comparable numbers of the participants from the science and social science programs. This sampling method resulted in 417 participants (141 males, 269 females, and 7 non-binaries) who were divided into 215 undergraduates studying in science programs (henceforth called "science participants") and 202 undergraduates studying in social science programs (henceforth called "social science participants"). These participants were considered suitable informants for the current study as they had direct experience learning English in the context for at least one academic term. They were familiar with the teaching practices employed, and they were drawn from the majority group of undergraduates in the study context. The participants' self-reported English proficiency levels varied, with 56.1% rating themselves as having minimal proficiency and 2.9% as having strong proficiency.

## **Instruments**

### ***Effective English Language Teacher (EELT) Characteristic Questionnaire***

An EELT characteristic questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. This instrument was adapted from Barnes and Lock's (2013) questionnaire that was based on their 2010 EELT attribute taxonomy. Two major amendments were made to Barnes and Lock's (2013) questionnaire. First, the EELT characteristics concerning teachers' technological and intercultural competence were added to reflect the EELT characteristics necessary for EFL teachers in the 21st century. Second, the original 7-point rating scale was reduced to a 4-point rating scale to avoid the respondents' misuse of the midpoint as a way out when they were ambivalent about the issue raised in each item (Chyung et al., 2017).

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part 1 was designed to collect the participants' personal information. Part 2 consisted of one open-ended question asking the participants to briefly describe important characteristics of effective English language teachers and 45 items of the EELT characteristics in which the participants rated their agreement with each of them on a 4-point scale from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. The questionnaire was prepared in Thai to ensure the participants' full understanding of its contents.

### ***Interview Protocol***

An interview protocol consisting of 10 questions was used to guide the focus group interviews and to elicit further clarification of the quantitative findings. Four focus group interviews (with 5-8 participants each) were conducted with a total of 25 participants, divided into 12 science participants and 13 social science participants. These participants were interviewed because they fulfilled the criteria of (i) their answers to the open-ended question in Part 2 of the questionnaire which warrants further clarification, and (ii) their consent to partake in the interview. All focus group interviews were conducted in Thai to avoid language barriers.

### ***Instrument Validation***

The validity and reliability of both instruments were ensured through several steps. Three experts in English language teaching (ELT) performed an item-objective congruence (IOC) analysis of each item on both instruments. According to the IOC analysis results, all items on both



instruments were rated from 0.6 to 1 which is above the acceptance score of 0.5 as recommended by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977, as cited in Turner & Carlson, 2003). Besides, a pilot study was performed with 40 students who had similar demographics to the participants. These students were asked to answer the questionnaire, and seven of them participated in a mock interview guided by the interview protocol. Their answers to the questionnaire were run through SPSS 21 to test the questionnaire's internal consistency reliability. The test indicated that these items were reliable, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.877. The mock interview also revealed that the interview took approximately 50 minutes, and all items in the protocol were comprehensible and could yield the intended data.

## **Data Collection**

The data collection was divided into two phases. In the first phase, the participants were informed about the study and consented through a consent form approved by the university's ethics review board under the Certificate of Approval (COA) No. RSUERB2022-102. Once the participants' consent was obtained, a questionnaire was distributed to them for completion. In the second phase, four focus group interviews (two with the science participants and two with the social science participants) were conducted to gather qualitative insights.

## **Data Analysis**

Given the study's explanatory sequential research design, the quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed first. The quantitative findings were then used to develop the interview protocol that was subsequently used to collect the qualitative data during the focus group interviews. Details of the data analyses are provided below.

### ***Quantitative Analysis***

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed by descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentages) to exhibit the participants' demographics and their overall perceptions toward the EELT characteristics to answer the first research question. In this regard, findings from the 45 items of the 4-point rating scale in Part 2 of the questionnaire would be interpreted as per details in Table 2 which were adapted from the interval and descriptions suggested by Watson Todd (2018, p.75). This scale interpretation was adopted on the grounds that each point's

interval has an equal length, helping to avoid bias toward the closest end value.

**Table 2**

*Four-Point Likert Scale Interpretation*

Point	Interval	Description	Interpretation
1	1.00-1.75	disagree	Not important at all
2	1.76-2.50	neutral	Not important
3	2.51-3.25	agree	Important
4	3.26-4.00	strongly agree	Very important

To answer the second research question, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the means and standard deviations of the science participants' and social science participants' responses to the 45 items to ascertain whether any statistical difference exists in their perceptions toward the EELT characteristics.

### ***Qualitative Analysis***

The qualitative data from Part 2 of the questionnaire and the focus group interviews were analyzed by content analysis as explicated by Selvi (2019). Two experienced coders with ELT backgrounds at the tertiary level were selected to carry out the content analysis. First, both coders read through the open-ended responses from the questionnaires and the transcribed interview scripts to gain a general understanding of the data. Next, they identified and applied the coding units to the data. The coded data were then categorized into groups based on recurring patterns or themes. The reliability of the analysis was supported by a high inter-rater agreement, with Krippendorff's alpha calculated at 0.95, indicating excellent consistency between the two coders (Krippendorff, 2004).

Finally, the t-test's and interviews' findings were triangulated together to provide a comprehensive answer the second research question, ensuring a robust interpretation of the data.

## **Findings**

### **Answer to RQ1: What are Thai undergraduates' perceptions of EELT characteristics in science and social science programs?**

Table 3 shows the participants' perceptions toward the five categories of the EELT characteristics.

**Table 3**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Rank Orders of Participants' Perceptions Toward Five Categories of EELT Characteristics*

Category	Science Participants (n=215)			Social Science Participants (n=202)		
	M	S.D.	Rank	M	S.D.	Rank
Delivery	3.60	0.34	4	3.51	0.43	5
Organization and preparation	3.59	0.46	5	3.54	0.51	4
Fairness	3.65	0.47	3	3.59	0.53	3
Knowledge and credibility	3.70	0.39	2	3.63	0.47	2
Rapport	3.72	0.47	1	3.65	0.51	1

According to Table 3, both science and social science participants had similar perceptions toward the five categories of EELT characteristics. Both groups rated rapport as the most important category, followed by knowledge and credibility, and fairness. The only difference was the fourth and fifth important categories perceived by each group. While the science participants perceived delivery as more important than organization and preparation, the social science participants perceived these two categories in the reverse order.

Apart from the above findings, Table 4 shows the two groups' perceptions toward each EELT characteristic.

**Table 4**

*Science and Social Science Participants' Perceptions toward 45 EELT Characteristics*

Item	Effective English Language Teacher Characteristics	Science Participants (n=215)			Social Science Participants (n=202)		
		M	S.D.	Rank	M	S.D.	Rank
Delivery							
1	Be enthusiastic about teaching	3.80	0.43	1	3.74	0.49	1
2	Teach in English most of the time	3.27	0.64		3.29	0.70	
3	Speak English slowly and clearly	3.60	0.63		3.53	0.67	
4	Use general English vocabulary or easy words when communicating with students	3.58	0.55		3.52	0.59	
5	Use a variety of teaching techniques	3.65	0.60		3.48	0.71	
6	Let students do activities in pairs or group	3.43	0.75		3.47	0.72	
7	Integrate technology into teaching	3.73	0.53		3.65	0.62	
8	Use a variety of media and games to support teaching	3.59	0.66		3.34	0.78	

9	Give clear explanations when teaching	3.75	0.48		3.55	0.68	
10	Use real-life examples when teaching	3.73	0.51		3.60	0.69	
11	Give clear instructions when giving assignments or homework	<b>3.78</b>	<b>0.47</b>	3	3.63	0.67	
12	Give constructive feedback on students' performance/assignments	3.73	0.53		3.57	0.68	
13	Correct students' writing or speaking mistakes	3.69	0.54		3.62	0.64	
14	Teach English grammar that is necessary for general communication or work	3.65	0.53		3.53	0.63	
15	Encourage all students to participate in class	3.69	0.52		3.63	0.60	
16	Ask questions and wait for the volunteer to answer	3.69	0.52		3.62	0.60	
17	Ask questions and randomly call students to answer	<b>2.91</b>	<b>1.04</b>	4	<b>2.91</b>	<b>1.08</b>	4
18	Encourage students to ask questions or share opinions in class	3.60	0.60		3.56	0.62	
19	Tailor lessons' contents to suit students' English levels	3.69	0.54		3.56	0.65	
20	Encourage students to do out-of-class self-study activities/practices	3.48	0.68		3.43	0.75	
<b>Organization and Preparation</b>							
21	Be well-prepared for teaching and teach in an organized manner	3.72	0.51		3.68	0.56	
22	Provide students with a well-structured course syllabus and explain its important details to students	3.64	0.56		3.58	0.64	
23	Provide students with a well-structured course syllabus and explain its important details to students	3.64	0.57		3.57	0.68	
24	Teach according to the book or syllabus	3.50	0.66		3.49	0.68	
25	Prepare and provide students with supplementary materials or extra handouts	3.46	0.72		3.38	0.77	
<b>Fairness</b>							
26	Give attention and listen to all students in the class	3.72	0.56		<b>3.70</b>	<b>0.59</b>	5
27	Give all students equal opportunities to participate in class activities	3.73	0.52		3.63	0.67	
28	Design and provide assessments that relate to or resemble activities in class	3.59	0.62		3.48	0.69	
29	Assess students' performance according to clear grading criteria	3.59	0.63		3.54	0.65	

<b>Knowledge and Credibility</b>						
30	Have a degree in English or English Language Teaching (ELT) or equivalent	3.69	0.55		3.62	0.58
31	Have sound knowledge of English grammar	3.71	0.51		3.67	0.57
32	Have sound knowledge of English vocabulary	3.76	0.48		<b>3.73</b>	<b>0.50</b> 2
33	Have native-like pronunciation	3.58	0.57		3.54	0.59
34	Communicate fluently in English	3.73	0.46		3.67	0.57
35	Have intercultural communication competence or knowledge (i.e., can interact or know how to interact with people from different cultures appropriately)	3.72	0.51		3.60	0.60
36	Know and can suggest reliable reference sources of the English language	3.72	0.51		3.62	0.58
37	Be capable of answering complex questions about English language usage	3.72	0.49		3.56	0.61
<b>Rapport</b>						
38	Be friendly and kind	<b>3.78</b>	<b>0.54</b>	4	<b>3.73</b>	<b>0.56</b> 3
39	Have positive teacher-student relationships with their students	<b>3.80</b>	<b>0.49</b>	2	<b>3.70</b>	<b>0.59</b> 5
40	Share personal and professional experiences with students	3.48	0.72		3.39	0.75
41	Care about and listen to students	3.73	0.54		<b>3.70</b>	<b>0.59</b> 5
42	Be patient, flexible, and accessible to students	3.74	0.57		3.65	0.62
43	Have positive attitudes about students	<b>3.77</b>	<b>0.52</b>	5	<b>3.73</b>	<b>0.57</b> 4
44	Understand students' different levels of English proficiency	3.75	0.50		<b>3.70</b>	<b>0.59</b> 5
45	Be good entertainers and have a sense of humor	3.72	0.58		3.63	0.61
Overall		3.65	0.35		3.57	0.43

Table 4 shows that both science and social science participants perceived all 45 EELT characteristics as very important ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 0.35$  and  $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ). For the science participants, their top five EELT characteristics were “be enthusiastic about teaching” under the delivery category ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ), “have positive teacher-student relationships with their students” under the rapport category ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ), “give clear instructions when giving assignments or homework” under the delivery category ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ), “be friendly and kind” ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ), and “have positive attitudes about students” ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) under the rapport category. Conversely, the EELT characteristic considered least important by the science participants was “ask questions and randomly

call students to answer” under the delivery category ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). Although this characteristic received the lowest mean score, its standard deviation was the highest, suggesting that the science participants’ perception of this characteristic was heterogeneous.

On the other hand, the social science participants rated eight characteristics as their top five EELT characteristics. Specifically, they perceived “be enthusiastic about teaching” under the delivery category as the most important characteristic ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) and “have sound knowledge in English vocabulary” under the knowledge and credibility category as the second most important characteristic ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ). “Be friendly and kind” ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) and “have positive attitudes about students” ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ) under the rapport category were rated as the third and fourth important characteristics, respectively. Finally, four characteristics were perceived as the fifth important characteristic because they received the same mean and standard deviation ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ). These four characteristics were “give attention and listen to all students in the class” under the fairness category, “have positive teacher-student relationships with their students”, “care about and listen to students”, and “understand students’ different levels of English proficiency” under the rapport category. Additionally, in the social science participants’ view, “ask questions and randomly call students to answer” under the delivery category was the least important ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). Similar to the science participants’ perceptions, the social science participants’ perception of this characteristic is diverse as indicated by the highest standard deviation.

Moreover, Question 2.1 in the questionnaire asked the participants to briefly describe “effective English language teachers” in their views. The content analysis of the science participants’ responses to this question revealed the EELT characteristics that fall within the delivery and rapport categories while those of the social science participants fall within the delivery, rapport, and knowledge and credibility categories. These responses are consistent with each group’s top five characteristics shown in Table 4. Additionally, the characteristics under the fairness and organization and preparation categories were rarely mentioned by the participants in each program. Table 5 below shows the key findings from Question 2.1 in detail.

According to Table 5, five descriptions deserved special attention as they were mentioned by over 20% of the participants in each group. These descriptions were “being caring and understanding” under the rapport category; “teach and make lessons easy to understand for students”, “teach by letting students practice using English for real-life communication”, and “teach lessons in a fun and engaging manners” under the delivery category; and “have sound knowledge in English” under the knowledge and credibility category. These descriptions which also align with the findings in Tables 3

and 4 were used to formulate questions in the interview protocol to obtain further clarification during the focus group interviews.

**Table 5**

*Participants' Descriptions of Effective English Language Teachers*

Category	Effective English language teachers are those who	No. of Participants Giving the Description	
		Science Participants (n=215)	Social Science Participants (n=202)
Rapport	• are caring and understanding	68	74
	• understand students' different levels of English competencies	28	26
	• do not insult, pressure, or make fun of students when they make mistakes in speaking	29	34
	• can give advice or be a counselor to students	25	32
Delivery	• teach and make lessons easy to understand for students	70	63
	• teach by letting students practice using English for real-life communication	61	55
	• teach lessons in a fun and engaging manners	55	45
	• use various teaching techniques	25	-
Knowledge & Credibility	• have sound knowledge of English	-	41

*Note.* One description can include several EELT characteristics and fall into more than one category.

**Answer to RQ2: How do Thai undergraduates in science and social science programs differ in their perceptions of EELT characteristics?**

To ascertain how the perceptions toward the EELT characteristics of the science and social science participants are similar or different from each other, an independent samples t-test was first used to compare the means of the participants' responses to the 45 items in Part 2 of the questionnaire. Next, findings from the content analysis of the interview responses of the participants in two programs were comparatively analyzed. Finally, the findings from the independent samples t-tests and the comparative analysis of the interview responses were triangulated together to answer the second research question.

### ***Independent Samples T-Test's Findings***

The independent samples t-test showed that a significant difference existed between the science and social science participants in their perceptions toward the 45 EELT characteristics at the significant level of 0.05. However, the effect size of 0.2040, calculated based on Cohen (1989), implied that the difference in the perceptions between the two groups is small. Table 6 shows the t-test's findings.

**Table 6**

*Statistical Comparison of Perceptions toward EELT Characteristics of Science and Social Science Participants*

	N	Mean	S.D.	t	Sig.	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Science participants	215	3.65	0.35	2.023	0.044	0.2040
Social science participants	202	3.57	0.43			

\* $p < .05$

Another independent samples t-test was performed to ascertain whether any significant difference exists in the science and social science participants' perceptions toward the five categories of these characteristics. The latter t-test revealed that only the delivery category was perceived differently by the two groups at a significant level of 0.05 as shown in Table 7. This finding is consistent with the earlier finding that both groups ranked the importance of the delivery category differently.

**Table 7**

*Science and Social Science Participants' Perceptions toward Five Categories of EELT Characteristics*

Category	Science Participants (n = 215)		Social Science Participants (n = 202)		t	Sig	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Delivery*	3.60	0.34	3.51	0.43	2.379	0.018	0.2321
Organization and Preparation	3.59	0.46	3.54	0.51	1.021	0.308	0.1029
Fairness	3.65	0.47	3.59	0.53	1.363	0.173	0.1197
Knowledge and credibility	3.70	0.39	3.63	0.47	1.779	0.076	0.1620
Rapport	3.72	0.47	3.65	0.51	1.425	0.155	0.1427

\* $p < .05$ .



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### ***Interview Response Comparative Analysis Findings***

The interview findings from both science and social science participants were presented under three topics based on the key findings derived from the interview data.

The first topic pertains to key EELT characteristics available from the participants' responses to Questions 1, 6, and 7 in the interview protocol which asked participants to identify key EELT characteristics. The responses of the interview participants in both programs to these questions similarly revolved around the characteristics under the rapport, delivery, and knowledge and credibility categories with a few participants stating the characteristics under the fairness category as shown below.

Effective English language teacher can explain and help students understand the lessons easily. (S5, science program)

Effective English language teachers must have a cheerful personality. (S13, social science program)

Effective English teachers must have good English skills. They know and use various teaching techniques while teaching. (S23, social science program)

I want the teachers who are fair in teaching. Once I studied with one teacher who also gave private lessons to some students. I found that the quiz this teacher had us do in class was the same exercise that he used in his private lessons. I think this is not fair to other students. (S1, science program)

The above responses are consistent with the findings in Tables 3, 4, and 5. Moreover, they mirror the content analysis findings of Question 2.1 in the questionnaire that the characteristics under the organization and preparation category were not mentioned by any participant.

The second topic related to the EELT characteristics under the delivery category. This topic emerged from the participants' responses to Questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8 in the interview protocol which aimed to obtain further clarification of the EELT characteristics under the delivery category that the participants had previously provided in Question 2.1 in the questionnaire. Questions 2 and 3 asked participants to explain what it means to use a teaching method that lets students practice English, and whether this is the same as teaching that helps students understand the lesson content. For these questions, participants in both programs similarly responded that the teaching method of allowing students to practice using English primarily involves productive skills. They also indicated that this method differs from teaching that focuses on helping students understand lesson content.

However, both approaches were considered equally important and should be implemented in parallel. Below are selected responses that illustrate these points.

Teaching by letting students practice is when teachers tell students to use given words to write sentences by themselves. Then, the students read their sentences aloud. In this way, the students can practice both writing and pronunciation. (S12, science program)

I think they are different. Teaching by helping students understand lessons is like introducing students to a theory. Teachers should help students understand what that theory is before letting them put that theory into action. It's important to have a good grasp of something before you do anything about it. For example, if you are a professional boxer, you should know how to punch or do footwork first, and this is all about theory. Then, you can try it out. (S25, social science program)

Question 4 asked the participants to express their opinions toward the EELT characteristic of asking questions and randomly calling students to answer, which was given the lowest mean by the participants in both programs. The opinions of the interview participants in both programs on this characteristic were similar in two ways. First, approximately 50% of the participants in each program agreed with this EELT characteristic while the other half disagreed. This finding accords with the high standard deviations of this characteristic shown in Table 4. Second, the participants in both programs provided similar reasons to support their agreement and disagreement with this EELT characteristic. Those agreeing with this characteristic believed that calling students randomly to answer questions can make students more active and reduce their boredom. Conversely, those who disagreed opined that this characteristic can pressure and embarrass students. The following excerpts illustrate these responses.

I agree. I remember some teachers checked students' attendance by randomly calling students to answer questions. In these classes, I had to stay focused to know when the teacher would call me. If I didn't, I would lose a chance to answer questions, and I would lose my attendance point. Before having these classes, I had to prepare myself well to be ready to answer questions. It made me active in class. (S9, science program)

I disagree with that because it can pressure or even scare students because they feel like they are being watched, and they're afraid of making mistakes. (S23, social science program)

For Question 5, the participants were asked to describe a fun English class. The content analysis of the interview responses revealed that the participants in both programs similarly perceived a fun English class as a class where students could play games and interact with their teachers and classmates. It is a class with a relaxing atmosphere where teachers teach interesting and well-organized lessons in a fun way and provide students with extra knowledge beyond the lessons.

Finally, Question 8 asked the participants to choose between Teacher A and Teacher B who have opposite strengths and weaknesses. Teacher A is good at delivering lessons, but very strict in class management and grading. Teacher B is friendly and kind, but cannot deliver lessons as well as Teacher A. For this question, most participants in science programs chose Teacher A. However, among the social science participants, the votes for Teachers A and B were quite close. In this regard, the participants in both programs provided similar reasons to support their choices. Those choosing Teacher A believed that Teacher A could help them understand the lessons easily and develop themselves to be better people. Conversely, those choosing Teacher B preferred studying in a stress-free atmosphere, and Teacher B's weakness in delivering the lesson was not a big issue. Some of the responses to this question are illustrated below.

I prefer teachers who teach well because that is my goal of studying. I don't mind if they are strict because their strictness can help me to be more self-disciplined, and I can apply this to my future work. (S10, science program)

I want to be happy learning. I don't want to force myself to come to class. Although Teacher B cannot give me a 100% clear explanation, it's enough to have an overall understanding of the lesson. I can make use of it, but the good thing is I don't feel stressed while studying. (S25, social science program)

The final topic related to the EELT characteristics under the knowledge and credibility category. This topic emerged from the participants' responses to Questions 9 and 10 in the interview protocol. Question 9 asked the participants to show their views toward the statement, "Anyone who can communicate in English can be an English language teacher." All participants in the science programs unanimously disagreed with this statement for two reasons. First, the ability to communicate in English does not guarantee that anyone with that ability knows how to teach. Second, to be an English teacher, one needs to have in-depth knowledge of English and psychology in language teaching and learning. On the other hand, while most participants in social science programs disagreed with the statement for the same reasons given by the science participants, a few of them agreed with this statement.

Below is one response given by a social science participant agreeing with the statement.

Many people now use social media to teach English, and most of them are not English teachers. These people use their first-hand English communication experiences with foreigners to teach us what we should say in different situations. Most of what they teach is not found in class or textbook, but it can be used in real-life communication. So I think they can be English teachers. (S22, social science program)

Question 10 asked the participants whether or not English language teachers need to know the cultures of native English speakers or other countries. All interview participants in both programs unanimously replied that cultural knowledge was not a must for English language teachers. However, if the teachers have such knowledge, it can make their lessons and teaching more interesting.

Based on a triangulation of findings from the t-tests and interview data addressing the second research question, it can be concluded that the science and social science participants' perceptions of EELT characteristics were generally similar, although the t-test results indicated some statistically significant differences. This conclusion was based on the findings that both groups similarly perceived all the 45 EELT characteristics as important to highly important, and rated rapport as the most important category. Besides, they identically rated "be enthusiastic about teaching" and "ask questions and randomly call students to answer" with the highest and lowest means, respectively. Additionally, several interview responses of the two groups were comparable.

## Discussion

The study reveals that despite disciplinary differences, both science and social science participants in this study have similar perceptions toward EELT characteristics. Both groups perceived rapport characteristics as highly important for being effective English language teachers. This finding accords with several scholars' propositions (e.g., Harmer, 2015; Zamani & Ahangari, 2016) and aligns with prior studies in Thailand (e.g., Chanmanee, 2018; Chumworatayee, 2021; Meksophawannagul, 2015; Wangdi & Shimray, 2022), indicating that Thai students prefer a supportive and understanding learning environment. This preference for rapport may reflect a general desire for a stress-free atmosphere with caring and understanding teachers conducive to learning.

However, the study's findings on the delivery category present a nuanced picture. While both groups of participants rated delivery as the fourth and fifth most important category, individual characteristics within this category received high mean scores. This discrepancy suggests that delivery is a significant but not the primary focus, contrasting with previous studies where delivery was ranked highest (Barnes & Lock, 2013; Chanmanee, 2018). The variation may be attributed to differences in how delivery is conceptualized or prioritized in different contexts, emphasizing the need for more precise definitions and measures of teaching effectiveness.

For the characteristics under the knowledge and credibility category, these characteristics could be considered the third most important in the eyes of both groups. This finding affirms the assertion by various scholars that English language teachers should possess sound knowledge of English. (Dinçer et al., 2013; Harmer, 2015; Kereluik et al., 2013). However, this finding is quite different from the findings of Chumworatayee (2021) and Meksophawannagul (2015) who found that their students perceived knowledge and credibility as least or nearly least important. It is also worth noting that the quantitative and qualitative findings on this category of the science participants are inconsistent. While their top five EELT characteristics shown in Table 4 fall into the rapport and delivery categories only, their responses to Question 9 during the interviews indicate their prioritization of teachers' knowledge and credibility as well. These different findings, by and large, show how a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods can help provide a comprehensive answer to the research question.

Concerning the characteristics under the categories of fairness and organization and preparation, these characteristics were considered important in the questionnaire, but they were stated by only a few participants in Question 2.1 in the questionnaire and during the interviews. Based on these findings, it is possible to conclude that the participants perceived these characteristics as important, but still secondary to those under the rapport, delivery and knowledge and credibility categories. In this regard, the fairness characteristic findings are consistent with Chumworatayee's (2021) and Meksophawannagul's (2015) findings that their students ranked fairness as the fourth most important category. As for the preparation and organization characteristic findings, these findings are quite contrary to Said's (2017) finding that the students viewed organization and communication very important.

Finally, despite the growing emphasis on technological and intercultural competence in EFL teaching, such competence was understated by the participants. The possible reasons for this understatement are that EFL teachers today may have strong technological competence as a result of their teaching experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the participants

may view that they can acquire and develop their intercultural competence by themselves from various media on the Internet.

## Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate and compare the perceptions toward the EELT characteristics of Thai undergraduates in science and social science programs. Overall, the undergraduates from both programs had similar perceptions toward the EELT characteristics, and most of their perceptions accord with theoretical propositions that rapport is the most important. Among the five categories of EELT characteristics, the undergraduates in both programs perceived rapport as the most important category, followed by delivery, and knowledge and credibility while fairness and preparation and organization categories were not strongly emphasized by the participants. As for individual EELT characteristics, “be enthusiastic about teaching” was the most important while “asking questions and randomly calling students to answer” was considered the least important by undergraduates in both programs.

## Implications

The study’s findings concerning rapport and knowledge and credibility characteristics imply that EFL teachers, especially those in the Thai context, should maintain a balance between their hard skills and soft skills. Put simply, they are not only required to have sound knowledge of English, but they should also exercise great care when interacting with their students, both verbally and nonverbally, to have a good relationship with them and avoid offending any student unknowingly or unintentionally. Additionally, the finding concerning the delivery characteristics indicates that EFL teachers need to constantly improve their teaching methods to make their teaching more effective and engaging. Apart from current ELT teachers, these findings can be utilized by teacher educators in designing a practical teacher training course for prospective EFL teachers in the future.

Moreover, this study reveals two implications for educational institution administrators. The first implication relates to the finding that many participants would like their EFL teachers to teach them by letting them practice using English for real-life communication. To meet this requirement, educational institution administrators should ensure that the number of students in each English class is appropriate. Since English is a subject that combines subject knowledge and four communication skills, it is rarely possible for one teacher to effectively teach and monitor every single student in a class of 40-60 students. The second implication is drawn from the finding

that effective English language teachers in the participants' views are those having sound knowledge of English and pedagogical knowledge. This finding shows that students have high expectations of their EFL teachers; thus, it is neither appropriate nor legitimate for any educational institution to appoint individuals who can communicate in English but do not have formal education in English language education or related fields as English language teachers.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

This study bears some limitations. First, its findings are not generalizable to undergraduates in science and social science programs at other universities which may have their own characteristics. Because the students' perceptions of the EELT characteristics are context-dependent, this type of study can be replicated in other contexts to ascertain whether the findings would be similar or different and to better understand student perceptions. Second, this study mainly focused on the rapport, delivery, and knowledge and credibility categories. Thus, further research can be conducted to investigate students' perceptions toward the fairness and organization and preparation categories which are under-explored in this study. Additionally, it is interesting to discover whether technological development in the form of language learning applications or artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots would have any impact on students' perceptions toward the role and importance of effective English language teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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### **About the Author**

**Kanchana Cheewasukthaworn:** A lecturer at Rangsit English Language Institute, Rangsit University. Her research interests include EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions, intercultural communicative competence, and language testing and assessment.

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