

Unlocking Excellence: English Language Teacher Quality Model (ELTQM)

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Article history:

Received: 21 November 2024

Accepted: 11 December 2024

Published: 1 April 2025

Abstract

The journey towards teaching excellence in the dynamic landscape of English as a Second Language (ESL) education remains a persistent challenge due to fragmented approaches to defining and assessing teacher quality. Existing frameworks often focus narrowly on isolated attributes, overlooking the holistic interplay of cognitive skills, social-emotional competencies (SEC), and personal characteristics necessary for impactful teaching. Addressing this gap, an innovative English Language Teacher Quality Model (ELTQM) redefines the paradigm by synthesising passion, cognitive abilities, SEC, and personality traits into a unified framework. Grounded in phenomenological research and informed by practical insights from 13 expert ESL teachers, this model transcends conventional notions of teacher effectiveness, embracing the holistic development of educators as catalysts for transformative learning experiences. Central to this model is the recognition of educators as lifelong learners driven by a deep love for teaching and commitment to continuous professional growth. By integrating cognitive skills, such as pedagogical knowledge and language proficiency, with SEC like empathy and adaptability, ELTQM equips teachers with versatile guidelines to navigate diverse classroom environments confidently and compassionately. ELTQM contributes to teacher education (TE) institutions and policymakers by suggesting a more holistic assessment tool and targeted professional development initiatives. Through the adoption of ELTQM, institutions can cultivate a culture of excellence, foster collaborative learning communities and empower educators to unlock their full potential while inspiring student success.

Keywords: *ESL education, holistic development, lifelong learning, teacher quality, transformative journey*

Introduction

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities are the foundations of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), established by the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). Central to achieving this goal is the recognition that the quality of education is profoundly influenced by the competencies and attributes of teachers, particularly in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) education (Schleicher, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In an increasingly globalized world, marked by rising migration and diverse, multicultural classrooms, the demand for highly skilled ESL teachers has never been more critical. Meeting this demand necessitates a comprehensive framework that defines, assesses, and supports teacher quality, equipping educators to address diverse learner needs and facilitate effective language acquisition.

Traditionally, teacher assessments have focused narrowly on technical skills and language proficiency, often neglecting essential social-emotional competencies and affective traits that play a vital role in classroom dynamics and student success (Day & Gu, 2010). Addressing this gap, the English Language Teacher Quality Model (ELTQM) was developed based on the insights of 13 expert ESL teachers who provided valuable perspectives on the attributes of quality English language educators. Their voices highlight the importance of a holistic approach that integrates passion, cognitive abilities, and social-emotional competencies into a unified framework for teacher quality. Grounded in phenomenological inquiry, this study introduces ELTQM as a pioneering initiative aligned with SDG 4. The model offers a transformative vision of teacher quality, emphasising the interconnectedness of technical expertise, empathy, adaptability, and lifelong learning. By synthesising these key domains, ELTQM contributes to the global pursuit of inclusive and high-quality education, equipping educators to inspire and empower learners in diverse contexts.

The ELTQM is built upon four foundational domains: passion, cognitive abilities, social-emotional competencies, and personality traits. Each domain encapsulates specific attributes essential for high-quality teaching. Passion encompasses the love for teaching and dedication to lifelong learning. Cognitive abilities include proficiency in English, pedagogical content knowledge, and classroom management skills. Social-emotional competencies cover emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. These social-emotional competencies are crucial for positive development and occupational achievement (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schoon, 2021). Personality traits highlight the importance of being approachable, flexible, reflective, creative, innovative, and patient. This model aims to provide a holistic understanding of teacher quality, promoting a balanced development of both professional skills and personal attributes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

The development of the ELTQM is informed by a thorough review of existing literature and empirical research, emphasising the multifaceted nature of effective teaching. The ELTQM offers a robust framework for teacher assessment, professional development, and policy formulation by integrating theoretical insights with practical considerations. This paper presents the conceptualisation and development process of the ELTQM, highlighting its potential to transform ESL education and advance SDG 4 by integrating new standards for teacher quality and excellence. By proposing innovative assessment tools and targeted interventions, the ELTQM seeks to empower educators, enhance teaching effectiveness, and ultimately improve student learning outcomes, thereby contributing to the global goal of ensuring quality education for all.

Literature Review

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), introduced by Albert Bandura (1986), offers a robust foundation for understanding teacher quality in English as a Second Language (ESL) education. SCT posits that human behaviour is shaped by a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors. In the context of ESL education, this theory emphasizes the importance of teacher self-efficacy, cognitive capabilities, and emotional regulation in shaping instructional practices and student outcomes.

Teacher self-efficacy—a central concept in SCT—refers to educators' beliefs in their ability to influence student learning, even in challenging environments (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Research demonstrates that high self-efficacy correlates with innovative teaching practices, resilience, and better classroom management. For ESL teachers, self-efficacy is crucial as they navigate linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. Bandura's (1997) emphasis on the role of observational learning and modelling highlights the importance of professional development and mentorship in fostering teacher growth, aligning closely with the goals of the ELTQM.

Social-emotional competencies, another component of SCT, are increasingly recognized as vital for effective teaching. ESL teachers, who often work with students from varied cultural backgrounds, require empathy, adaptability, and interpersonal skills to create inclusive learning environments. By integrating SCT, the ELTQM acknowledges these competencies as integral to teacher quality, offering a holistic approach to professional assessment and development.

Threshold Concepts

The concept of Threshold Concepts, introduced by Meyer and Land (2003), provides another critical lens for examining teacher quality in ESL education. Threshold Concepts are transformative, integrative, and often troublesome ideas that serve as portals to new ways of thinking and practicing within a discipline. For ESL teachers, grasping Threshold Concepts such as cultural responsiveness, language acquisition theory, and reflective practice is essential for professional growth.

Threshold Concepts are not merely additive; they fundamentally change how teachers understand and engage with their practice. For instance, understanding the concept of interlanguage—the transitional linguistic system learners develop—can reshape how ESL teachers approach error correction and curriculum design (Liang, 2020).

The ELTQM incorporates Threshold Concepts to emphasise the transformative journey and nature of the teaching profession. By identifying these critical junctures, it helps to inspire teacher education programmes to design curricula and professional development initiatives that facilitate deep, meaningful learning experiences.

Communities of Practice

Another theory that provides a social framework for understanding how ESL teachers develop expertise and maintain professional growth is the concept of Communities of Practice (CoP), developed by Wenger (1998). A CoP is a group of individuals who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better through regular interaction. In ESL teaching, CoPs often emerge informally among teachers within schools, professional organisations, or online platforms.

Participation in a CoP fosters the sharing of best practices, collaborative problem-solving, and mutual learning, which are critical for addressing the complex demands of ESL classrooms. Wenger (1998) identifies three core components of CoPs: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. For ESL teachers, these components manifest in collaborative lesson planning, discussions about student progress, and best practices and resources.

By incorporating CoP principles, this study emphasises the social dimensions of teacher quality. The ELTQM encourages the establishment of collaborative learning communities where teachers can refine their skills, share insights, and collectively address challenges. This aligns with research highlighting the positive impact of peer collaboration on teacher efficacy and student outcomes (Nilsen & Gustafsson, 2016).

Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that ESL teaching requires specialized frameworks that account for both pedagogical and affective competencies. They highlight the need for assessment tools that capture the complexities of teaching in multilingual classrooms. The ELTQM builds on these findings by integrating theoretical and practical dimensions of teacher quality into a unified framework.

Methodology

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative research design, adopting a phenomenological approach to examine expert ESL teachers' lived experiences and perspectives on quality teaching. This methodology aligns with the study's objective to provide rich, detailed insights into the social interactions and teaching experiences that shape the attributes of a quality English language teacher. By focusing on the holistic interplay of cognitive skills, social-emotional competencies, and personality traits, the phenomenological approach facilitates the exploration and conceptualisation of the English Language Teacher Quality Model (ELTQM). This research design is well-suited to uncover the various dimensions of teaching excellence, contributing to the development of a robust model aligned with contemporary educational needs.

Participants

The study engaged 13 expert ESL teachers, each with over ten years of teaching experience in diverse educational settings, ranging from 12 to 33 years. Participants were selected for their recognised expertise, validated through their promotion under the Excellent Teacher Scheme (Guru Cemerlang) or their roles as Heads of the English Panel (Ketua Panitia). Additionally, their English proficiency levels were classified as CEFR C1 to C2, based on the Aptis proficiency test mandated by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE). These educators provided valuable perspectives on quality teaching, drawn from their extensive experiences as language educators.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, allowing the participants (identified as T1 to T13) to share their detailed insights into the attributes and practices of quality English language teaching. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of their lived experiences and perceptions of effective teaching.

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards, with approvals secured from the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM), MoE, the State Education Department (JPN), the local District Education Office (PPD), and the participating institutions. Participants were informed of their rights, including the freedom to ask questions, withdraw from the study at any time, and maintain anonymity to ensure their contributions did not affect their professional standing or status. These measures ensured a secure and transparent research environment.

Data Analysis and Peer Debriefing

Data from the interviews were transcribed and analysed using Atlas.ti (version 22). Employing the coding methods by Saldana (2013) and thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2022), the researcher used a mixed approach to analysis, allowing themes to emerge both inductively from the participants' experiences and perspectives and deductively from previous literature. Two research team members initially listened to the audio recordings and read and transcribed the data. Next, using Atlas.ti, the researchers highlighted segments of the transcripts and labelled them with relevant codes. These codes were categorised based on similarities, with any redundancies or inconsistencies resolved. The coded segments were then transferred into a matrix table to establish themes.

The research team held several peer-debriefing sessions to discuss participants' responses, codes, and irregular cases, facilitating agreement on recurring themes. This iterative process involved multiple interactions between the text, codes, and themes, leading to an interpretive phase where the units were integrated into an explanatory framework consistent with the text. Themes were further clustered, and descriptive

phrases were allotted to each theme. Two expert reviewers were appointed to corroborate and validate the findings to ensure the validity of the themes and the domains of the ELTQM as a whole. Figure 1 shows the diagrammatic representation of the data analysis procedure.

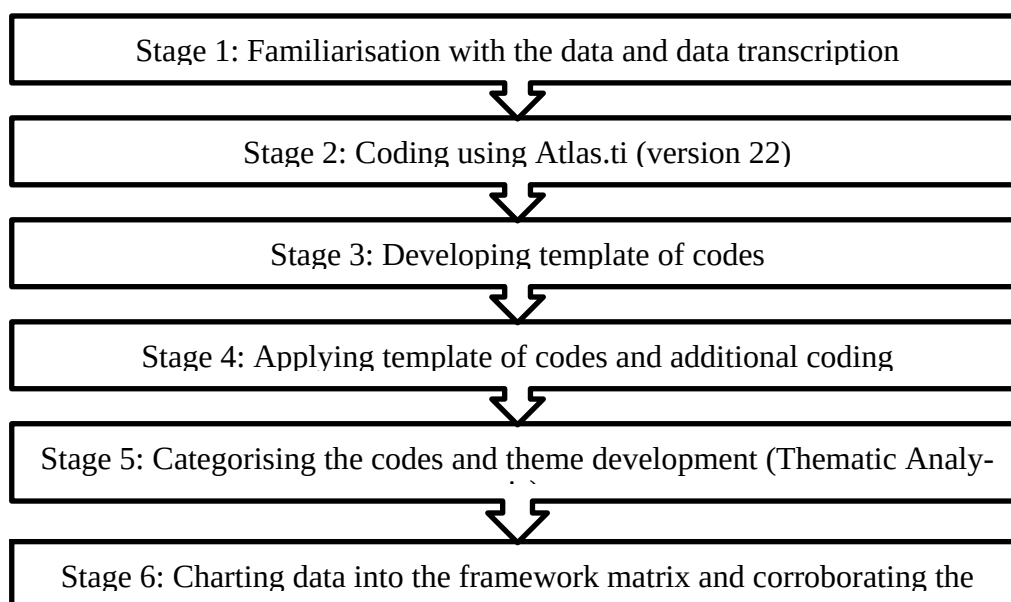


Figure 1: Data Analysis Procedure

Findings

In exploring the critical factors that constitute teacher quality in the context of English language teaching (ELT), this study draws on semi-structured interviews with 13 expert ESL teachers. The findings revealed four main themes that define the attributes of quality English language teachers: passion for teaching, cognitive abilities, social-emotional competencies (SEC), and personality traits. These themes highlight the multi-faceted nature of teacher quality and underscore the diverse skills and characteristics essential for effective language instruction. Table 1 provides a summary of these attributes, encapsulating the primary domains of the ELTQM as identified through the responses of the participating expert teachers.

Table 1: Attributes of quality English language teachers

Attributes	Manifestations (sub-themes)	Examples/Descriptions
Passion for teaching	● Passionate ● Lifelong learning ● Committed ● Dedicated	● Love, excitement and commitment to teaching ● Self-development ● Genuine interest in student development. ● Willing to share knowledge and best practices
Cognitive abilities	● Proficiency ● Pedagogical knowledge and skills	● Mastery of the language ● Effective teacher talk ● Pedagogical Content knowledge ● Classroom management skills

Social-emotional competencies	● Emotional Intelligence ● Adaptability ● People skills	● Empathy ● Compassion ● Human touch ● Embracing challenges
Personality traits	● Approachable ● Flexible and open ● Reflective ● Creative and innovative ● Patient	● Relationship-building ● Modify/adapt lessons ● Admitting mistakes ● Finding alternative approaches

When participants were asked about the essential qualities of an excellent English language teacher, passion for teaching emerged as the primary criterion. This finding is surprising considering the prevalent emphasis on proficiency as the primary criterion for recruiting English language teachers. However, the interviews and member-checking procedures conducted in this study reveal that passion for teaching is indeed an essential attribute of a quality English language teacher. Without passion, teachers would struggle to perform their tasks effectively, fail to create a positive impact on their students, and would not survive in their early teaching career.

You must have that passion to teach because it is only that that will sustain you through all this stuff. If not, I think I would have quit so long ago. I mean, even in my first few years, perhaps I would have quit after facing all those criticisms. Whereas the passion, I mean, what kept me going during that time was, the students enjoying. And then I was enjoying myself, you know. (T6)

Additionally, T4 emphasized the necessity of having a passion for the subject matter and a genuine concern for the students, stating that without these attributes, one can "kill the teaching profession." Although T4 acknowledged the possibility of being a good teacher without passion, true success in teaching requires a genuine and deep-rooted passion for the profession that extends beyond the confines of the classroom;

Need to be passionate about students, not only the subject...and you need to love your students...You need to be passionate for teaching. For teachers, have passion first then only you teach. Because if you don't have the passion, you're going to kill the teaching profession...I know you can be a good teacher but without passion, you cannot go beyond just in school (sic). (T4)

Furthermore, cognitive abilities emerged as another quality attribute of English language teachers. The analysis revealed two sub-themes associated with cognitive abilities: English language proficiency level and pedagogical content knowledge and skills. This study's results support the significant role of the teacher's cognitive abilities, especially in influencing classroom instruction, classroom management and the teacher's self-efficacy. When discussing the role of proficiency in influencing student performance, participants consistently expressed the view that proficiency is crucial for becoming a quality English language teacher and for effective teaching.

Of course, you should have at least above-average proficiency, definitely. Because some students, they're quite proficient in English, and once they realize that you make mistakes or you're not as good, they will really look down on you. (T5)

Notably, the importance of pedagogical knowledge and skills harmonises seamlessly with the tenets outlined in the Malaysian Teacher Standards (MTS) established in 2009. These standards dictate that teachers should possess a firm grasp of the subject matter, curriculum, and co-curriculum in order to teach effectively. Moreover, these benchmarks underscore the vitalness of expertise in teaching and learning skills, particularly in lesson planning, execution, and evaluation (Goh & Wong, 2015).

The analysis of quality English language teacher attributes revealed another significant finding: the importance of Social-Emotional Competencies (SEC). Teachers with a high EQ can better connect with their students, understand their needs, and foster a supportive learning environment. EQ empowers teachers to recognize and appropriately respond to their students' emotions, improving engagement and learning outcomes.

I'm a strong believer in Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence because we were talking about IQ, but we've forgotten about EQ... Emotional quotient... I think nowadays some teachers actually lack EQ... They focus more on IQ, but some of them really lack EQ; this is through my observation... So, those are the elements that have been left out in a teacher. So, EQ plays a very huge role in a teacher's life as well... It's not only IQ, but EQ as well. (T3)

This perspective emphasizes the importance of EQ in teachers' ability to connect with students, understand their needs, create a supportive learning environment, manage behaviour, handle stress, and maintain professionalism. This result ties nicely with previous studies wherein they found that SEC is essential in terms of transfer of knowledge because they feel that students are more motivated to engage in the lessons if

teachers use positive emotions in their teaching (Aldrup et al., 2022; Korotaj & Mrnjaus, 2021). Korotaj and Mrnjaus (2021) further explained that teachers who view themselves as emotionally competent are likely to enhance their student's self-confidence, and they are inclined to get to know their students by considering their specific needs. These teachers also were more confident in their abilities to help the students, a similar finding found in this study. Social-emotional competencies are getting more attention as significant predictors of various life outcomes, such as educational and occupational goals, well-being and health. (Schoon, 2021). They are equally important as cognitive abilities in building a teacher's identity.

Personality traits were identified as essential attributes of quality teachers, with participants highlighting five key traits: being approachable, flexible and open, creative and innovative, reflective, and patient. Being approachable was seen as crucial for building a positive relationship with the students to gain their trust and interest in the lessons. The participants used the words such as 'friendly', 'confidant', 'make friends', and 'rapport' to describe the desired teacher-student relationship. Flexibility and openness allowed teachers to adapt their methods and strategies to cater to the diverse needs and learning styles of students. Creativity and innovation were also highlighted as valuable attributes, enabling teachers to design engaging lessons that address challenges like short attention spans and passive learning tendencies common in some classrooms. Furthermore, embracing mistakes as opportunities for learning were seen as positive traits that foster mutual respect and a shared learning journey with students. Lastly, patience was emphasized as vital for accommodating different learning paces and challenges in the classroom.

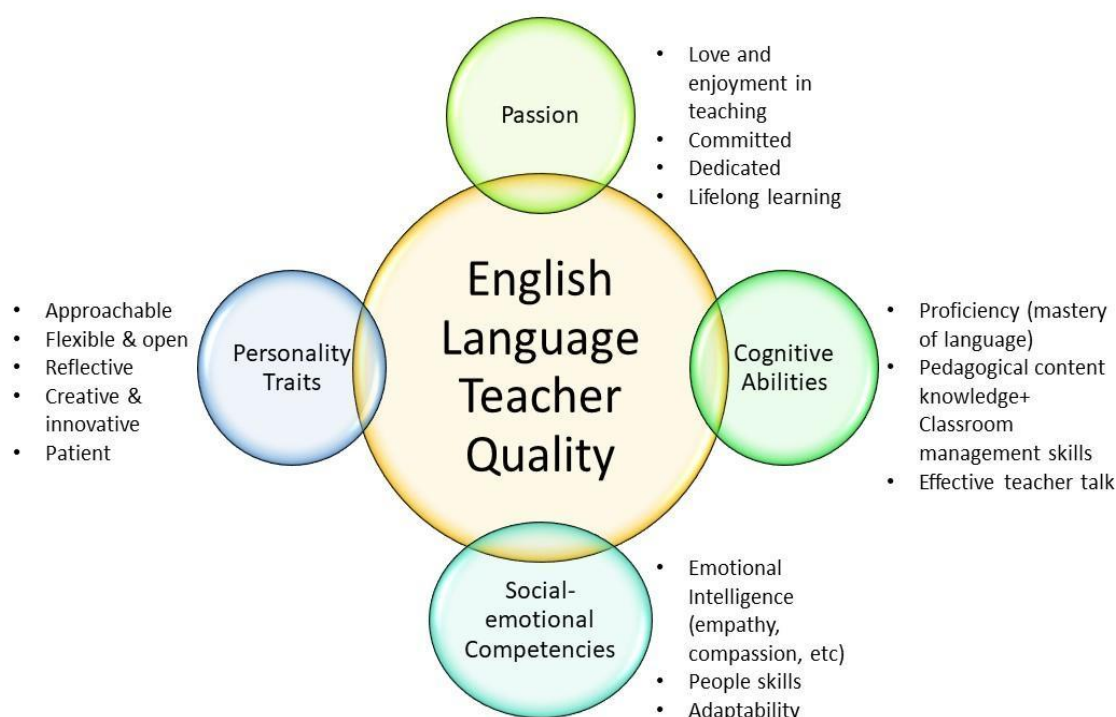


Figure 2: English Language Teacher Quality Model (ELTQM)

Based on these findings, the English Language Teacher Quality Model (ELTQM) was developed to address the limitations in current teacher education programs, which often neglect the social-emotional competencies (SEC) crucial for effective teaching (Rezazadeh et al., 2023). This model emphasizes a holistic perspective on teacher quality, integrating four key domains: passion (affective aspect), cognitive abilities (cognitive aspect), SEC (social-emotional aspect), and personality traits (behavioral aspect). These dimensions collectively provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating and enhancing teacher effectiveness. Figure 2 illustrates how the ELTQM maps onto these different domains. Identifying these multi-dimensional aspects within teacher quality is necessary to facilitate efforts to build on specific teacher attributes and direct focus to other salient aspects or domains in teacher professional development.

Discussion

While passion for teaching is not typically categorised as a social-emotional competency, it is closely related to the affective aspects of teaching and can contribute to the overall effectiveness of an English teacher. In this study, passion for teaching is considered a motivational factor that drives teachers to engage with their students, create a positive learning environment, and continuously improve their instructional practices. This finding echoes the statement by Mart and Deniz (2013), who claimed that a teacher who is passionate about their subject could consider a problem from various angles and is constantly engaged in their classroom. A passionate teacher will work hard to establish a close teacher-learner relationship to create an exciting and positive learning environment that facilitates student development through a supportive learning environment. (Aldrup et al., 2022). Day (2004) supports this statement and claims that when students perceive their teacher's unwavering dedication to a specific field of study and the maintenance of high standards within it, they are more likely to approach their work with a sense of importance, following the teacher's inspiring example rather than feeling coerced or submissive.

It is also important to note that most of the participants in this study believed that teachers not only need to be good in their content knowledge, but they have to be good pedagogically. In other words, teachers not only need to know what to deliver to the students, but they also need to know how to deliver the lessons effectively. The study's findings align with previous insights by Kepol (2017), which highlighted the importance of two criteria - pedagogical competence and mastery of the English language - as the foundation for defining teacher quality within the Malaysian English language teaching context.

Nevertheless, cognitive abilities alone are insufficient in defining or describing quality English teachers. The findings have shown that social-emotional competencies (SEC) are equally important yet often neglected in teacher-training programmes. According to Kepol (2017), looking at teacher quality based on pedagogical competence and mastery of the English language alone has not been able to capture the com-

plexity and dynamics of the concept of teacher quality. Many other attributes work together in tandem to develop a teacher's quality that a teacher should possess and demonstrate. The results of this current study emphasise the importance of SEC in building solid teacher-student relationships, adapting to the dynamic nature of the educational landscape, understanding and interpreting students' struggles and emotions, motivating classroom engagement, and establishing good relationships with the school community.

SEC was not focused in previous studies as there is a lack of consensus on the definitions and shared approaches in assessment procedures, which poses questions regarding their usefulness in education. In a study by Korotaj and Mrnjaj (2021), they discovered that teachers are aware of the importance of developing SEC but also stressed that there is a lack of such training in both initial teacher education and professional development. However, recent efforts and studies have encouraged the development of SEC through frameworks such as Collaborative for Academic, Social Emotional Learning (CASEL), which aims to promote positive learning environments that are supportive and engaging for SEC development (Gresham et al., 2020; Schoon, 2021).

The findings also elucidate some personality traits that were essential attributes of quality teachers: approachability, flexibility, openness to novel ideas, creativity, innovation, reflexivity, and patience. Drawing a comparative lens to the investigation by Jones et al. (2019), where a psycho-lexical analysis yielded five overarching constructs within the Big Five framework to categorise personality descriptions, it is apparent that some of these defined attributes mirror facets of extraversion and agreeableness (as evident in approachability and openness to suggestions), openness (embodied by creativity and innovation), and conscientiousness and neuroticism (reflected in patience). Costa et al. (2019) describe personality traits as relatively stable dispositions that underpin certain behaviours, cognitions, and emotions across varying circumstances and temporal dimensions. They also found evidence that suggests that these personality traits could evolve or transform due to environmental factors and interventions.

The insights from this study demonstrated the importance of incorporating innovative pedagogies, fostering an environment that embraces imperfection, cultivating an amicable rapport with students akin to friendship, and demonstrating unwavering patience when grappling with challenges. By manifesting these attributes, teachers can create an environment encouraging growth, trust, and meaningful engagement with the language and subject matter. A similar conclusion was drawn by Hamid et al. (2012) and Mohammaditabar et al. (2020), highlighting the essential role of personality traits in shaping quality teachers and effective teaching.

Conclusion

The English Language Teacher Quality Model (ELTQM) represents a significant advancement in the field of teacher assessment and professional development. By synthesising insights from Social Cognitive The-

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ry, Threshold Concepts, and Communities of Practice, the ELTQM offers a holistic framework that addresses the multifaceted nature of teacher quality.

The model emphasizes the interconnectedness of cognitive skills, social-emotional competencies, and professional growth, providing a comprehensive approach to evaluating and supporting ESL teachers. ELTQM captures and maps vital aspects critical to defining teacher quality. This model could serve as a framework to inform, facilitate and review existing assessment tools so that teacher quality is measured from the cognitive aspects (e.g., language proficiency) and other attributes such as social-emotional competencies. Thus, it promotes a more comprehensive appraisal of teacher quality. Furthermore, ELTQM can also be used as a supplementary tool for self-assessment and professional development, allowing teachers to demonstrate their proficiency in the different dimensions of teacher quality. This model introduces a fresh perspective on teacher attributes and qualities, diverging from those focusing only on teachers' technical competencies. It harmonises personal and professional attributes, blending ideology with practice and heart with mind. This holistic approach shapes a comprehensive roadmap for both the initial and continuous development of ESL teachers.

The insights derived from this project not only guide the design of pertinent teacher development courses but also provide implications for the formulation of potential interventions through dynamic and systematic training, reinforcement, monitoring, evaluation and support strategies. These interventions are aimed at fostering the development of high-quality and resilient teachers, in alignment with the aspirations articulated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, Malaysian Teacher Standards and the global Sustainable Development Goals.

While the development of the ELTQM offers significant insights into teacher quality and professional development, it also opens avenues for further exploration. Future studies should investigate the applicability and adaptability of the ELTQM in diverse educational contexts, such as rural, urban, and international ESL settings. This research could examine how cultural and systemic differences influence the model's implementation and effectiveness, ensuring its relevance across varied educational contexts. Additionally, given the increasing role of digital tools in education, future research could explore the integration of technology into the ELTQM framework. Studies might focus on how digital platforms and tools can support self-assessment, peer collaboration, and targeted professional development, enhancing the model's accessibility for ESL teachers worldwide.

Author contributions

Study conception and design: N.A., and A.T.F.S.; Data collection: N.A.; Analysis and interpretation of results: N.A., and E.W.B; Writing - draft preparation: N.A., and A.T.F.S.; Writing – Reviewing and editing: E.W.B. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Acknowledgement

The publication of this article is supported by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and Research and Innovation Division, National Defence University of Malaysia.

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