Research article

Culture expectations in foreign language classrooms – A case in Vietnam

Huynh Trang Nguyen a, Hoang Anh Khau b, *

a School of Foreign Languages, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH), Viet Nam
b School of Foreign Languages, Tra Vinh University, Viet Nam

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Oriental classroom culture
Western classroom culture
Cultural expectations
Roles and styles

ABSTRACT

This study explores Vietnamese EFL teachers' and Vietnamese EFL students' opinions on cultural expectations of roles and styles related to teachers and students in the English classroom. The instrument of a five-point Likert scale questionnaire was deployed and delivered to both the teachers and students to collect the data. One set of the questions was about classroom expectations in an Oriental classroom culture (in the Vietnamese context), and the other asked the participants about the classroom expectations in a Western classroom culture (in the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language in Vietnam). The results revealed that both groups of the participants have a tendency to adopt the characteristics displayed in the Western classroom culture more than those in the Oriental classroom culture. Their perspectives on individual questions were quite similar, producing a consistent result for consideration. Some recommendations for future investigation are also included in the study for future researchers to investigate.

1. Introduction

It has been long said that when teaching a foreign language, its culture is automatically integrated into this language introduction. “Language and culture have a complex, homologous relationship. Language is intertwined with culture. They have evolved together, influencing one another in the process, ultimately shaping what it means to be human” (Language Magazine, 2020). In this aspect, foreign language learners will be easily influenced by the culture of the language they are learning. When learners and teachers are exposed to a new language, they are introduced to conversational contexts or reading contexts in which native speakers in different groups and statuses in a particular society take different roles. These different roles are likely to have different authority while participating in conversations or within a certain context. To understand a conversation or a reading message better, foreign language learners have to master the roles and lifestyles of participants. In addition, these learners need to master the way these speakers represent themselves in groups or in the community. Therefore, when foreign language learners are learning a foreign language, they are prone to adopting the new culture integrated into this language. In this study, we aim to discover how Vietnamese EFL teachers (EFL: English as a Foreign Language) think about themselves as teachers and their students. Furthermore, it aims to investigate how Vietnamese students majoring in English think about their Vietnamese EFL teachers in their English classrooms. The study aims to look at the two general images of classroom expectations in the West and Orient. In the case of English being treated as a foreign language in Vietnam, the authors hypothesize that English culture will be potentially brought alongside in the classroom. This hypothesis reflects what Said (1978) mentioned; that is a Western style seems to integrate into and restructure the Oriental style when it comes to contact. Cambridge Dictionary (2022a,b) defines the Orient as the countries of East and Southeast Asia and the West as North America and Western Europe.

2. Literature review

A good teacher is viewed quite similarly in many previous studies and this study explores the qualities shaping a good teacher so that the researchers can have more ideas about good teaching styles in the EFL classroom. A first look at the qualities of a good teacher is quite dense. A good teacher is a strong communicator, a lifelong learner. In addition, a good teacher listens well, focuses on collaboration, shares best practices and values real-world learning. In addition to these qualities, a good teacher is adaptable, engaging, empathetic and patient (Southern New Hampshire University, 2021). A good teacher needs to develop his or her profession in life. Then, according to this view, the teacher's communication skill, social skill, and knowledge of psychology play important roles along their pedagogy path. Meilhami and Salite (2019) also explored...
the EFL students' perceptions of the cultural identity development of EFL teachers participating in cultural negotiation programs in an English class in Iran. Four EFL students were invited for the interview. They were asked to write their interactional narratives for their perspectives in three-time intervals (at the start of negotiation, at the middle of it, and at the end of it). The result disclosed that the EFL students showed positive perceptions of EFL teachers' ability to deal with cultural issues after completing the cultural negotiation program. They engaged more in cultural negotiation contexts with diverse negotiation types in Iranian classrooms. Overall, this program played a role in EFL teachers' development in instructional, professional, cultural, and cultural-professional identity.

The next point to be made is about the literature found in Yu et al. (2018), who depicted interesting portraits of a good teacher in many parts of the world (South Asian portrait of the teacher, Western world values, cultural heritage and pedagogical practices, the Northern American region, and many more), and from there they generalized qualities of a good teacher as follows. Overall, a good teacher must be able to insert sympathy to students, ensuring equality in relationships between the teacher and the student (mutual trust and cooperation). One more generalization is that a competent teacher will be able to bring students' interest in the subject their teacher is teaching, thereby making students become more curious, critical and autonomous learners. Finally, a good teacher should have a strong will power to set a role model and moral ideal for their students to look at and follow. In this view, it seems that to become a good teacher is extremely difficult, and it requires a teacher to be knowledgeable, moral, and professional.

Nguyen and Hall (2016) found in their study that most Vietnamese EFL teachers have changed their cultural images. They replaced their untouched wisdom, brilliance and authority that used to exist with a more gentle behavior in their teaching. They also found that in providing feedback, most of them treated feedback in a friendlier way and with open discussion. This trend can be understood that when Vietnam has come to contact the world and especially with the Western, their former doctrine has been minimized.

A more thorough study on the teachers’ qualities was conducted by Raufelder et al. (2016) when they investigated students' perceptions of “good” and “bad” teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eighty six 7th and 8th graders from German secondary schools based on their everyday school experiences and classroom interactions. They focused on three major points for a good teacher: quality of teacher–student relationship (including appreciation, individual consideration, and sympathy), teaching expertise (motivation, comprehensible teaching, and variety/flexibility during lessons) and teacher’s personal characteristics (assertiveness, humor, and empathy). For the low quality of teacher–student relationship, it looked into relational aggression, injustice, and antipathy. Lack of teaching expertise was recognized through disinterest/indifference, incomprehensible teaching, and teacher-centered instruction. For “teacher’s personal characteristics”, it looked at lack of assertiveness. Thus, in this study, to be judged as a good teacher, the teacher must acquire both aspects, which were interpersonal characteristics and knowledge competence. This investigation of dichotomy helps the participants locate better ideas of a good teacher. As can be seen, a good teacher must acquire many criteria.

To test Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of the Vietnamese EFL teachers' qualities, Tran (2015) conducted interviews with the university participants. All of the students were told to think about the answer to the question of the qualities in English teachers needed to facilitate their learning in commercial English language centers. A survey was delivered to 339 Vietnamese students with different backgrounds in different English language centers in the south of Vietnam. They were asked to rate the degree of importance of teacher qualities that helped improve their English language learning on a five-point Likert scale. The questions centered on these teachers’ qualities such as English language competence, ability to apply EFL teaching principles, personal attributes, ability to meet students' learning needs, ability to use effective assessment, ability to exploit teaching resources, knowledge of subject area content, knowledge of cultures of English speaking countries and knowledge of the Vietnamese culture. The students highly appreciated the teachers’ English language competence (M = 4.48) and EFL teaching principles (M = 4.46). Teachers' personal attributes took fourth place (M = 4.12). The rest accounted for general agreement of the students and among which professional attributes obtained the lowest agreement, M = 3.61. The result of this finding aligns with Raufelder et al. (2016) as both studies emphasized the teacher's expertise, teaching methodology including psychology, morality and English cultural competence to form a good teacher.

Ali et al. (2015) found that many English teachers and college students studying English as a foreign language in Pakistan and Iran seem to learn English to complete their communicative and practical purposes in daily life. They seem to be incompetent in acquiring intercultural communication in English since it is treated by classical instruction and applies pedagogical strategies as prescribed in textbooks. For this view of teaching, it is difficult for English users in these countries to integrate the Western cultures. As is known, in many circumstances, learning a foreign language without integrating its culture into the learning process can cause difficulties.

Dissimilar to the finding of Nguyen and Hall (2016), Nguyen (2015), brought traditional beliefs in Vietnamese college lecturers' perception of face into discussion. The lecturers are afraid of losing face, so saving face will help them maintain their students' absolute trust in their knowledge. The teachers' incompetence is unacceptable. The competence includes elements such as teachers' subject knowledge, teaching skills, classroom management skills. These beliefs force Vietnamese EFL teachers to merely transfer knowledge to passive listeners in the classroom; Time for deploying possible teaching techniques to encourage learners to search for knowledge wanes. This perception of saving face can either propel a teacher to endeavor in their career path or trigger hidden weakness that he or she is striving to cover. Therefore, such perception must be viewed as a positive way to foster endeavor made by both the teacher and learner.

Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2015) recruited 233 English teachers and 171 students from Grade 9 to 12 in Omani schools in the Arab Gulf to test their perceptions of characteristics forming a good teacher. The questions centered on major seven categories which displayed the questions about content knowledge (teaching and learning), pedagogical knowledge (teaching or learning), knowledge of oneself-general characteristics, knowledge of oneself-affective variables, knowledge of oneself-professional development, knowledge of students, and knowledge of classroom management. The results revealed that all these seven categories answered by the student participants received the mean score of over 3.0, meaning these qualities are all important. In the same vain, all the categories answered by the teacher group obtained the mean score of over 3.0, but many obtained the mean score close to 4.0 (very important), higher than those provided by the student group. This study can be said to have almost everything about shaping a good teacher. Clearly, it is challenging to gain such vast knowledge of diverse aspects in the teaching setting.

It seems less tense when talking about a good teacher as it only explored the teacher's personality in the study conducted by Salehi (2010). She investigated the relationship among personality factors of students and their effects to judge a good teacher. The author randomly chose 346 male and female students at a city secondary school in Iran. For their hypotheses were made respectively: (a) Extrovert students prefer teachers of witty nature to other teachers; (b) Introvert students prefer teachers who accept the ideas of students of other teachers; (c) Introvert students prefer strict teachers over other teachers; (d) Introvert students prefer teachers who have flexible behaviors over other teachers. They found that extrovert students prefer witty nature teachers. The general results showed that both groups of the participants gave priorities to the teachers who are kind, sympathetic, benevolent, patient, cheerful, mentally stable and self-restrained. This result helps us to think about
different age-group teachers, too, because younger and older teachers can own different personalities. To be good teachers, they should train themselves to overcome their hostile characteristics to suit the students’ preference.

Majid (2009) employed a qualitative method to explore how cultural values influence selected successful adult learners. Three Malaysian postgraduates from the Education Faculty in one of the public tertiary institutions in Malaysia were recruited for the interviews. The participants were interviewed separately for about 2 h in English. They discovered that “religious” and “relationship oriented” were the common cultural values that influenced the respondents’ views on learning. As known, pursuing a higher degree for most Muslims is regarded as an endeavor to acquire sufficient language of Arabic characters to read the Quran with correct diction and appropriate enunciation. In addition, “collectivistic”, not individualism was seen as another cultural value to dominate their view on learning to complete their Master’s program effectively. This “collectivistic” mind also reflects the culture of Vietnamese people who tend to share things and cooperate in work. For example, they put all dishes in the middle of the dinner table so that everyone at the table can equally reach these dishes.

Simpson (2008) mentioned the conflict between the Western and Eastern classroom culture experienced by western EFL teachers who were working in China, and it was found Western pedagogy alone did not guarantee successful teaching in this country. That means they should research the culture and prior background of the Eastern classroom environment for adaptation. Some advice given by other researchers found in Simpson’s article like “receiving shy students in regular office hours” suggested by Tang and Absalom; “Providing supportive environment for risk-taking, hypothesis testing and providing feedback phrases as encouragement rather than criticism” advised by Mark; “Writing instruction on the board, asking students the questions directly not waiting for volunteers, incorporating the Western culture into their lessons to teach language but also to raise the students’ awareness of Western educational and societal ideals in a non-confrontational way” advised by Wong. Such pieces of advice are quite similar to the ideas of the Oriental classroom culture found in the current questionnaire in this study. The culture of Chinese and Vietnamese culture is somehow similar. According to Leibo (2015), “Among the non-Han peoples of South - East Asia, the Vietnamese people were the people most influenced by the Chinese people”. He also added “by the third century BC, Vietnam remained part of the Chinese empire for most of the next millennium” (p. 272). China, one of the countries in the Orient, is a vast and powerful country in Asia and its influence on other parts in this continent is great. As said by Mai et al. (2007), “Van hòa Việt Nam một phần cũng chịu ảnh hưởng của văn hóa Trung Hoa” [The Vietnamese culture is regarded to be partly influenced by the Chinese culture] (p. 15). As seen, in the very long past, Vietnam had been dominated by the Chinese, and therefore Vietnam hardly avoided this influence of the Chinese predominated culture. In order to find the answer to what constitutes an ideal teacher, Arnon and Reichel (2007) made an attempt to explore the similarity and difference in perception regarding the qualities of a good teacher. Eighty nine final-year education students in Israel in the Middle East were recruited for the study. They were following different education courses: physical education, teaching primary students, and nursery school future teachers. Thirty four of them had completed their first degree and continued their present study for another degree. They were asked three positive characteristics or qualities of an ideal teacher. The results revealed that the participants having teaching experience rated both core categories (personality and knowledge) in equal importance for an ideal teacher; whereas the students lacking teaching experience tended to put more weight on the personality components instead of the knowledge components. However, a small number of the students viewed a good teacher as a person who instills principles or possesses an educational outlook, and they appeared to devalue professional ethical elements like non-discriminatory attitudes. Moreover, they did not relate an ideal teacher as a person of culture or as a socializing agent.

As Simpson (2008) has found, Nguyen (2000) mentioned many of the characteristics of Vietnamese people in general and in the classroom in particular. In this context, the researchers would like to prioritize the classroom setting. Vietnamese students rarely volunteer in class and tend to wait to be called upon in order to answer questions, and hence they are understood as passive and non-cooperative learners. They like to keep quiet to show respect to their teachers. They try to avoid looking at the teacher’s eyes, but they feel it is normal to talk about personal information. They love to study with active teachers. They like to learn from mistakes. This literature is also seen to advocate for the Oriental classroom culture. After analysis of literature on cultural expectations in the classroom, the authors have found that to be a good teacher, this person needs plenty of characteristics. The classroom teacher is expected to have profound knowledge of his or her own expertise, teaching methodology, educational psychology and a good social role model. In order to continue to add more knowledge of cultural expectation values to EFL classrooms, the authors would like to investigate the three following research questions.

1. What do Vietnamese EFL teachers think about their own portrait of Vietnamese EFL teachers?
2. What do Vietnamese EFL students think about their Vietnamese EFL teachers?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the two groups’ ideas?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The objectives of the study are to see how the Vietnamese EFL teachers think about themselves as teachers and about their students. Furthermore, it is conducted to see how Vietnamese-EFL students think about their teachers in EFL classrooms. The researchers applied the quantitative approach to obtain the data. As the study is related to both the Western (refer to the context of teaching English, and the English culture is predicted to be intertwined in this context) and the Oriental (refer to the context of learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam) classroom culture, the study employed a group of Vietnamese EFL teachers and a group of Vietnamese EFL students majoring in English to answer the questionnaire related to cultural expectations of roles and styles of both teachers and learners. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was used for data collection which was then statistically analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

3.2. Participants

The study recruited two groups of subjects. One group was composed of 22 Vietnamese EFL teachers who are teaching English in a university. In order to optimize the result, the study aimed to recruit the Vietnamese EFL teachers who have taught English for over five years. Three of them are males and the rest are females. It is possible that certain language exposure may help contribute to cultural integration. Furthermore, all of these teachers had studied English in high school as the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training has made English a compulsory subject at this level. Recently, English has even been compulsorily taught in all levels of education in Vietnam. Hence, these teachers can be seen as the appropriate participants for the study. The other group is the employment of 112 Vietnamese EFL students majoring in English. Prior to their tertiary education, they all had studied English in primary school, secondary school, and high school. With such experiences, these students can also be seen as the appropriate participants for the study. Their ages range between 20 and 21. Ninety eight of them are females and the rest are males. They study English in hope to find a good job in English language teaching or in English-speaking organizations after graduation. Both groups volunteered to join the survey of the study.
3.3. Materials

The authors adopted the cultural expectations of roles and styles related to teachers, students, and school development by Hofstede (1986). These classroom teachers' characteristics represent the two different images/portraits of the classroom teacher in the Oriental and in the Western part. According to Brown (2007, p. 252), “Western cultures emphasize the nondirective, nonauthoritarian roles and teaching styles”. As Holiday (2005) put it, “the essentialist view of non-Western ‘culture’ was ... an inverted image of what the West thought of itself” (p. 19).

The purpose of using this dichotomy is to see which image/portrait these two groups prefer, and from there the authors hope the educators and researchers think more about expectations in the EFL classroom. The content, therefore, is considered worthy of investigation in this context to provide more insight into how to shape a good English teacher when he or she is teaching English as a foreign language in Vietnam.

3.4. Instruments

The study employed two sets of questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale to measure the participants' degree of agreement about the two images/portraits of an ideal English teacher. For the teachers, they were to show their agreement on what a teacher should be like in the classroom. For the students, they were to express their opinion on what kind of English teachers they think are suitable in the classroom. The same content questionnaire was applied to both the teacher group and student group, and it has two different sets of questions. One set represents the teachers' characteristics normally seen in the Oriental classroom culture and the other set represents the teachers' characteristics normally seen in the Western classroom culture. To support further analysis, Cronbach Alpha for reliability of the questionnaire was run and reached the value of 0.774, which can be confidently used to gain the objectives of the study. Procedure First, the questions were adopted and read carefully for slight adaptation to suit the students' groups. Then all the questions for the two groups were translated into Vietnamese to ensure the participants' understanding of the questions and thus ensuring the reliability of the participants' responses. Next, due to the pandemic situation, all the questions and permission notes for the survey were delivered to both groups via Google forms. The authors sent the questionnaire to 22 Vietnamese EFL teachers and 112 Vietnamese EFL students. This survey took place at the most convenient opportunity, as these teachers are our current colleagues, and these English-major students are matriculating in our university. Finally, the authors collected the questionnaires and entered the participants’ responses into the SPSS (version 22) for data analysis.

3.5. Procedure

First, the questions were adopted and read carefully for slight adaptation to suit the students' groups. Then all the questions for the two groups were translated into Vietnamese to ensure the participants' understanding of the questions and thus ensuring the reliability of the participants' responses. Next, due to the pandemic situation, all the questions and permission notes for the survey were delivered to both groups via Google forms. The authors sent the questionnaire to 22 Vietnamese EFL teachers and 112 Vietnamese EFL students. This survey took place at the most convenient opportunity, as these teachers are our current colleagues, and these English-major students are matriculating in our university. Finally, the authors collected the questionnaires and entered the participants’ responses into the SPSS (version 22) for data analysis.

3.6. Data analysis

The responses to each set of the questionnaire were carefully analyzed. The authors looked at the overall agreement of value 4.00 for each set of the questionnaire to see if more expectations fell into the classroom Oriental culture or the Western classroom culture. Then, they started to present the data and discussion. Firstly, the descriptive statistics of the two questionnaires for both teachers and students were run with the support of SPSS software to explore the expectations of each group about the classroom culture. Then, Independence t-test was run to compare whether both groups of the participants' views were different or similar.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Research question 1

The data collected for the first research question are presented statistically in Tables 1 and 2 as follows.

Table 1 illustrates the teachers' opinions on what a teacher should be like regarding the Oriental classroom culture. All the responses surpassed the mean score of 3.00, indicating they quite agreed with the ideas in this classroom expectations, except Item 3 “Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty” with M = 2.73, suggesting that this group of teachers quite disagreed with this idea. Item 4 “Teachers reward students for accuracy in problem solving” and Item 5 “Students admire brilliance in teachers” gained the highest mean scores in this group with M = 4.45, SD = .671 and M = 4.36, SD = .492, respectively, suggesting that these two ideas were much advocated by this group of teachers. However, the overall mean score (3.63) does not show the teachers' strong approval of these ideas shaping the Oriental classroom culture expectations. Table 2 illustrates the teachers’ perspective on the Western classroom culture. Twenty two of them joined this survey and the statistical result of their responses is shown in the table.

Table 2 demonstrates the teachers' opinions on what a teacher should be like regarding the Western classroom culture. Unlike the result seen in Table 1, most of the questions received the mean score of over 4.00. They are Item 3 “Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise”, Item 4 “Teachers reward students for innovative approaches to problem solving”, Item 5 “Students admire friendliness in teachers”, and Item 8 “Teachers expect students to find their own way”, indicating that the teachers agreed with these ideas about classroom expectations in the Western classroom culture. Noticeably, Item 6 “Students are encouraged to volunteer their thoughts” and Item 7 “Teachers can admit when they are wrong and still maintain students' respect were in strong support obtained

| Items | Opinions | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------|----------|----|------|----------------|
| 1     | Teachers are expected to have all the answers. | 22  | 3.45 | 1.184 |
| 2     | Teachers are expected to suppress emotions (and so are students). | 22  | 3.82 | .853 |
| 3     | Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty. | 22  | 2.73 | 1.638 |
| 4     | Teachers reward students for accuracy in problem solving. | 22  | 4.45 | .671 |
| 5     | Students admire brilliance in teachers. | 22  | 4.36 | .492 |
| 6     | Students should speak in class only when called on by the teacher. | 22  | 3.00 | 1.155 |
| 7     | Teachers should never lose face; to do so loses the respect of students. | 22  | 3.55 | .800 |
| 8     | Students expect the teacher to show them “the way”. | 22  | 3.64 | .790 |
| Overall|         | 22  | 3.63 | 0.60 |
Table 2. Teachers’ opinions about their role regarding the Western classroom culture.

| Items | Opinions | N | Mean | S.D |
|-------|----------|---|------|-----|
| 1     | Teachers are allowed to say “I don’t know”. | 22 | 2.91 | 1.11 |
| 2     | Teachers are allowed to express emotions (and so are students). | 22 | 3.82 | .733 |
| 3     | Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise. | 22 | 4.18 | .395 |
| 4     | Teachers reward students for innovative approaches to problem solving. | 22 | 4.64 | .492 |
| 5     | Students admire friendliness in teachers. | 22 | 4.27 | .456 |
| 6     | Students are encouraged to volunteer their thoughts. | 22 | 4.82 | .395 |
| 7     | Teachers can admit when they are wrong and still maintain students’ respect. | 22 | 4.55 | .510 |
| 8     | Teachers expect students to find their own way. | 22 | 4.27 | .631 |
| **Overall** | | | **4.18** | **0.60** |

the highest mean score. Nonetheless, Item 1 “Teachers are allowed to say “I don’t know” obtained 2.91, SD = 1.11 and that Item 2 “Teachers are allowed to express emotions (and so are students)” received M = 3.82, SD = 7.33. These two ideas were not favoured by the teachers. The overall mean score was 4.18 with its standard deviation of 0.60, suggesting that this group of teachers is keen on such ideas in classroom culture.

4.1.2. Research question 2

This section contains the findings collected from 112 student participants for their opinion on what their classroom teacher should be like. First, One-sample statistics analysis was employed to show the mean scores of their perspectives on the teacher’s role and styles regarding the Oriental classroom culture. Table 3 depicts the English-major students’ perspective on their teacher role in the Oriental classroom culture and their answers are statistically analyzed.

Table 3 depicts the students’ opinions on what a teacher should be like in the Oriental classroom culture. Three ideas were awarded below the mean score 3.00. Item 3 “Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty”; Item 8 “Teachers reward students for accuracy in problem solving” and Item 5 “Students admire brilliance in teachers” obtained the mean score of 4.00, suggesting that this group of students expect these ideas in the classroom. The rest showed an average opinion, which indicates the students were in a dilemma about such ideas. Finally, the overall mean score of 3.18 with its standard deviation of 0.91 does not support such ideas displayed in the classroom. Table 4 is the presentation of the students’ perspective on their teachers’ role in the Western classroom culture, and their responses are statistically analyzed.

At first glance, all the questions were awarded the mean score of over 4.00. They are Item 2 “Teachers are allowed to express emotions (and so are students)”, Item 4 “Teachers reward students for innovative approaches to problem solving”, Item 7 “Teachers can admit when they are wrong and still maintain students’ respect”, and Item 8 “Teachers expect students to find their own way”, indicating the students favor such ideas. Remarkably, Item 5 “Students admire friendliness in teachers” and Item 6 “Students are encouraged to volunteer their thoughts” were strongly advocated by this group of students and received the highest support. Only one item “Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise” obtained M = 3.71, SD = .821, meaning this idea was not strongly supported. Finally, the overall mean score reached 4.11 and its standard deviation was 0.52, suggesting that the students generally expect these ideas in the classroom.

4.1.3. Research question 3

To compare the teachers and students’ views, Independence t-test was employed. The data are presented in Tables 5 and 6 below. Table 5 shows the comparison between the teachers’ perspective and the students’ perspective in the Oriental classroom culture, and their individual responses are statistically analyzed and reported in the table.

Table 5 compares the two opinions provided by the teachers and students. The results reveal that there are some differences between the teachers and students for items 1, 2, 4, 5 and 8 but the differences were not statistically meaningful (sig.>.05). It indicates that these items witness no difference. However, for Items 3, 6 and 7, it was seen they are statistically different (sig.<.05) and the mean scores of the teacher group was found to surpass those provided by their counterparts. Table 6 demonstrates both the teachers and the students’ perspectives on the Western classroom culture and their response to each question is statistically analyzed and reported in the table.

Table 6 gives a picture of the correlation between the two opinions provided by the teachers and students about the portrait of a teacher in the Western classroom culture. The results show that there is insignificant difference for items 1, 2, 7 and 8 (sig.>.05) meanwhile Items 3,4,5 and 6 are found to be significantly different (sig..<.05). Importantly, it is seen that the mean scores of teacher participants surpassed the student participants only in Item 3, 4, and 6 but for Item 5 it was found that the student group’s mean score is bigger.

5. Discussion

Overall, the mean scores obtained in the teacher group are higher than those in the student group. As can be generally depicted in Table, the highest mean score. Nonetheless, Item 1 “Teachers are allowed to say “I don’t know” obtained 2.91, SD = 1.11 and that Item 2 “Teachers are allowed to express emotions (and so are students)” received M = 3.82, SD = 7.33. These two ideas were not favoured by the teachers. The overall mean score was 4.18 with its standard deviation of 0.60, suggesting that this group of teachers is keen on such ideas in classroom culture.
the teachers agreed with the qualities of an English teacher in the Oriental classroom culture. However, the mean score of 3.63 with its standard deviation of 0.60 does not show very strong approval. By contrast, the result in Table 2 shows stronger approval when it comes to discussing the qualities of an English teacher in the Western classroom culture with $M = 4.18$ and its standard deviation of 0.60. These results can lead us to believe that the teachers tend to adopt the teachers’ qualities presented in the Western classroom culture. As previously mentioned, these teachers have taught English for over five years, and they also had studied English prior to their teaching career. Such experiences may make a language learner and or a language teacher adopt the culture of the learned language, and in this case it is English. Such adoption can be understood that when people have been long exposed to something, they tend to be influenced by that thing, and this is evidenced by what Language Magazine (2020) had mentioned above. When a language is taught, its culture can be either explicitly or implicitly taught in a classroom. This exotic culture may even dominate the local one as mentioned by Said (1978) above. In many cases, language learners need to understand the culture of the language they are studying to tackle linguistic related problems. For example, an English speaker would say “carrying coals to Newcastle”, while a Vietnamese speaker would say “carrying wood back to the forests”. Other cases can be used as examples, too. In many circumstances, an English speaker would be polite to say “How are you?” to mean greetings, but a Vietnamese listener may understand this as a literal question and thus answer with “I’m fine. Thank you. And you?”. However, in fact, the speaker does not wait for such a response. When coming to discuss the results in Tables 3 and 4, the students agreed with the English teacher’s qualities in the Oriental classroom teacher, but they appeared to be less interested in the English teacher’s qualities in the Oriental classroom teacher, but they appeared to be less interested in them. The mean score of 3.18 and its standard deviation of 0.91 persuaded us to believe that they are less favorable in these qualities in the classroom. On the other hand, when talking about the teacher’s qualities in the Western classroom culture, they tend to be into these qualities with $M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.52$. Just like what we mentioned in the teacher group, the students have had experience in learning English since primary school and/or in commercial English language centers and now chose English as their major, so their exposure to the English environment has been accumulated, and this Western classroom culture might have influenced the way they think and act. It is remarkable that the results are significantly consistent when coming to compare the results of the two groups of the participants. The overall mean scores of the two groups for the teacher’s qualities in the Oriental classroom culture are lower than those in the Western classroom culture (Teachers for the Oriental and Western: $M = 3.63$, $M = 4.18$, respectively; Students for the Oriental and Western: $M = 3.18$, $M = 4.11$, respectively).

### Table 5. Comparison between the students’ and teachers’ view regarding the Oriental classroom culture.

| Items                                           | Group   | N   | Mean | SD   | Mean Difference | t    | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|-----|------|------|-----------------|------|----------------|
| 1 Teachers are expected to have all the answers. | Students | 112 | 3.59 | .982 | .135            | .568 | .571           |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 3.45 | 1.184|                 |      |                |
| 2 Teachers are expected to suppress emotions (and so are students). | Students | 112 | 3.55 | .928 | -.265           | -1.238| .218          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 3.82 | .853 |                 |      |                |
| 3 Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty. | Students | 112 | 2.07 | .927 | -.656           | -2.623| .010          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 2.73 | 1.638|                 |      |                |
| 4 Teachers reward students for accuracy in problem solving. | Students | 112 | 4.13 | .850 | -.330           | -1.714| .089          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 4.46 | .671 |                 |      |                |
| 5 Students admire brilliance in teachers.        | Students | 112 | 4.30 | .733 | -.060           | -3.368| .014          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 4.36 | .492 |                 |      |                |
| 6 Students should speak in class only when called on by the teacher. | Students | 112 | 2.13 | .761 | -.875           | -4.488| .000          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 3.00 | 1.155|                 |      |                |
| 7 Teachers should never lose face; to do so loses the respect of students. | Students | 112 | 2.21 | 1.017| -.1331          | -5.790| .000          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 3.55 | .800 |                 |      |                |
| 8 Students expect the teacher to show them “the way”. | Students | 112 | 3.43 | 1.137| -.208           | -8.18 | .145          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 3.64 | .790 |                 |      |                |

### Table 6. Comparison between students’ and teachers’ view regarding the Western classroom culture.

| Items                                           | Group   | N   | Mean | SD   | Mean Difference | t    | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|-----|------|------|-----------------|------|----------------|
| 1 Teachers are allowed to say “I don’t know”.    | Students | 112 | 3.05 | 1.146| .144            | .544 | .588           |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 2.91 | 1.109|                 |      |                |
| 2 Teachers are allowed to express emotions (and so are students). | Students | 112 | 4.07 | .984 | .253            | 1.145| .254          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 3.82 | .733 |                 |      |                |
| 3 Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise. | Students | 112 | 3.71 | .821 | -.468           | -2.606| .010          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 4.18 | .395 |                 |      |                |
| 4 Teachers reward students for innovative approaches to problem solving. | Students | 112 | 4.36 | .642 | -.279           | -2.303| .027          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 4.64 | .492 |                 |      |                |
| 5 Students admire friendliness in teachers.      | Students | 112 | 4.63 | .773 | .352            | 2.065| .041          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 4.27 | .456 |                 |      |                |
| 6 Students are encouraged to volunteer their thoughts. | Students | 112 | 4.57 | .532 | -.251           | -2.064| .016          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 4.82 | .395 |                 |      |                |
| 7 Teachers can admit when they are wrong and still maintain students’ respect. | Students | 112 | 4.43 | .596 | -.117           | -0.860| .392          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 4.55 | .510 |                 |      |                |
| 8 Teachers expect students to find their own way. | Students | 112 | 4.04 | .758 | -.237           | -1.374| .172          |
|                                                 | Teachers | 22  | 4.27 | .631 |                 |      |                |
respective). This favor is seen as a positive trend to break the ice in the traditional Vietnamese classroom climate as mentioned in the work carried out by Nguyen (2000).

With these accumulated data, it can be concluded that both the teachers and students tend to adopt the teacher's qualities in the Western classroom culture. This preference is in line with Tran (2015)'s findings in which the participants valued the teacher's competence ($M = 4.48$), teaching principles ($M = 4.46$) and personal attributes ($M = 4.12$) as stated by Southern New Hampshire University (2021). They emphasized the importance of one's professional development and personal trait. In this study, when having a closer look at the responses to the Western classroom culture, in regard to teaching principles, both the teachers and students rated agreement for the item “Teachers reward students for innovative approaches to problem solving”, accounting for 4.64 and 4.36, orderly. In terms of personal aspects, the item “Students admire friendliness in teachers” obtained $M = 4.27$ (Teachers) and $M = 4.53$ (Students), in order. “Students are encouraged to volunteer their thoughts” made up $M = 4.62$ (Teachers), $M = 4.82$ (Students); “Teachers can admit when they are wrong and still maintain students’ respect” received $M = 4.55$ (Teachers), $M = 4.43$ (Students). “Teachers expect students to find their own way” obtained $M = 4.27$ (Teachers), $M = 4.04$ (Students). The idea of long exposure to the language to be taught found in the studies conducted by Mehami and Salite (2019), Arnon and Reichel (2007), and Nguyen and Hall (2016), who also supported such ideas of cultural integration after people have familiarized themselves in the language environment. When the subjects have exposed to the language for a certain period of time, they are inclined to adopt the culture integrated in that language.

Going back to the Oriental classroom culture, the findings extracted from both groups of the participants seem different from those found by Ali et al. (2015); Majid (2009); and Nguyen (2015). The participants in this study rated most of the questions (88.5%) about the teachers' qualities in the Oriental classroom culture low, just around the mean score of 3.00. For example, “Teachers are expected to have all the answers” accounted for $M = 3.59$ (Students) and $M = 3.45$ (Teachers); “Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty” even received a drastically lower mean score (Students: $M = 2.07$, Teachers: 2.73). Only Item “Teachers reward students for accuracy in problem solving” and Item “Students admire brilliance in teachers were rated above the mean score of 4.00. This can be easily understood that these opinion items share quite similar content (While in the Oriental classroom culture, the teachers looked for accuracy in problem-solving, in the Western classroom culture, the teachers favor innovation); With regard to the teacher's brilliance, both cultures share the same idea. The participants in both groups almost shared the same perspective. Being a good teacher is so demanding, which was also mentioned in the studies conducted by Raufelder et al. (2016). They found forming a good relationship between the classroom teacher and his or her students is crucial since such a relationship can help both parties feel at ease in the classroom and therefore helping create a relaxed classroom atmosphere. However, it can be sometimes difficult for a Vietnamese student to actively approach his or her teachers due to the social hierarchy. A Vietnamese student usually waits for the teacher's permission to express his or her ideas. Additionally, the teacher's teaching knowledge and the teacher's personal trait play a crucial role in lighting the teacher's image. The current participants' ideas also align with those of the participants in Yu et al. (2018) and Al-Mahrooji et al. (2015). A good teacher has to achieve a high standard. In order to gain full success in English class, the language teacher needs to go beyond his or her pedagogical expertise to bring learning potential in students and knows how to turn these students into autonomous learners in a long term. Therefore, the teacher's characteristics as well as his or her expertise play an integral part in shaping a good classroom teacher.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to find out how the Vietnamese EFL teachers think about themselves as EFL teachers and how Vietnamese EFL students majoring in English think about their teacher's qualities in both the Oriental classroom culture and Western classroom culture. These findings can greatly contribute to the development of cultural awareness in the EFL classroom. If the two cultures are not integrated well, it can cause communication to break down, and it can make both parties frustrated during classroom time. This problem was mentioned in Simpson (2008)'s work, in which the conflict between the Western and Eastern classroom culture occurred when a Western teacher taught in China. The current findings clearly suggest that both the teachers and students did not tend to adopt the teacher's qualities in the Oriental classroom culture. Instead, they tended to agree with the ideas presented in the Western classroom culture. Another finding is that both the Vietnamese EFL teachers and Vietnamese EFL students have quite similar positive responses when they gave their preference to the ideas displayed in the Western classroom culture although the teacher group showed more positive responses than the student group. Based on these findings, some recommendations are made. First, it is not right to say which culture is more proper. In the context of teaching English as a foreign language, we can consult the idea of Yu et al. (2018). These researchers mentioned the three important characteristics that shape a good teacher: sympathy, motivation and a role model. This study has a plentiful and detailed number of sources of teachers' qualities in many parts of the world. Teachers, especially from Western parts, can consult these distinctive features for their current teaching a foreign language so that they have a better understanding of their Vietnamese students in particular and possibly Asian students in general. Another point that should be brought into consideration is that it depends on the students' context/background to adjust teaching appropriately. Like in the Vietnamese context, students usually wait until being called on to speak out their ideas. They also do not want to see their teacher sitting on the teacher's table while teaching. Finally, it is up to the classroom teacher who will decide which method of teaching should be effective for their current students. As known, when teaching a foreign language, it is good to know about the language and culture to better understand the true/intended meaning of the involved speakers in a conversation or the involved writers and audience in written texts. For further research, researchers may find it interesting to compare how male and female Vietnamese EFL students majoring in English think about the cultural expectations in their English classes. Then, they may find it interesting to investigate possible teaching methods provided by the Western and Oriental groups as the findings may hugely contribute to bringing more innovative teaching methods into EFL classrooms. Finally, the study has some limitations. First, the authors were unable to collect a larger sample for the study. It should have investigated more groups of Vietnamese EFL teachers and Vietnamese EFL students majoring in English in other universities across Vietnam so that more thorough understanding of classroom culture expectations in Vietnam is achieved and a more reliable result is obtained. Second, this study treats the Vietnamese culture as one of the cultures in the Oriental part and English culture as one of the Western cultures, but suggests that a more specific culture of each country should be further investigated. Third, the study should have employed some other tools to collect the data to ensure a better result. For instance, if the two groups had been invited for semi-structured group interviews, the authors could have more information about them when they were thinking about the images of the teachers in the two classroom cultures.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Nguyen, Huynh Trang: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.
Khau, Hoang Anh: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.
Funding statement

This work was supported by University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH) and Tra Vinh University.

Data availability statement

No data was used for the research described in the article.

Declaration of interest’s statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

References

Al-Mahrooqi, R., Denman, C., Al-Siyabi, J., Al-Maamari, F., 2015. Characteristics of a good EFL teacher: Omani EFL teacher and student perspectives. Sage Open 5 (2), 1–15.
Ali, S., Kazemian, B., Mahar, I.H., 2015. The importance of culture in second and foreign language learning. Dinamika Ilmu 15 (1), 1–10.
Arnon, S., Reichel, N., 2007. Who is the ideal teacher? Am I? Similarity and difference in perception of students of education regarding the qualities of a good teacher and of their own qualities as teachers. Teachers and Teaching. Theor. Pract. 13 (5), 441–464.
Brown, H.D., 2007. Teaching by Principles: an Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy, third ed. Pearson-Longman.
Cambridge Dictionary, 2022a. The Orient. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/englishto-orient.
Cambridge Dictionary, 2022b. The West. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/west?q=West.
Hofstede, G., 1986. Cultural differences in teaching and learning. Int. J. Intercult. Relat. 10, 301–325.
Holliday, A., 2005. The Struggle to Teach English as an International Language. Oxford University Press.
Language Magazine, August, 2020. Blurring the Line between Language and Culture. https://www.languagemagazine.com/blurring-the-line-between-language-and-culture/.
Leibo, S.A., 2015. East and Southeast Asia 2015-2016. Rowman & Littlefield.
Mai, N.C., Do, T.H., Ho, H.H., Nguyen, T.T.H., Ngo, T.L., 2007. Giáo Thủy Văn Hòa Phát Mạng Đông [Oriental Cultures]. NXB. Nhà Xuất Bản Hà Nội/ Ha Noi Publishers.
Majid, F.A., 2009. Culture and Learner Beliefs: A Study of Three Malay Postgraduate Students. Asian Journal of University Education, pp. 127–142.
Melhami, H., Salite, I., 2019. EFL teachers’ cultural identity development through participating in cultural negotiation: probing EFL students’ perspectives. J. Teach. Educ. Sustain. 21 (1), 115–127.
Nguyen, H.T., 2000. Vietnam: cultural background for ESL/EFL teachers. Review Vietnamese Stud. 2 (1), 1–6.
Nguyen, T.Q.T., 2015. The influence of traditional beliefs on Vietnamese college lecturers’ perceptions of face. J. Educ. Teach. 41 (2), 203–214.
Nguyen, T.M.H., Hall, C., 2016. Changing views of teachers and teaching in Vietnam. Teach. Educ. 28 (3), 244–256.
Raufolder, D., Nitsche, L., Breitmeyer, S., Keßler, S., Herrmann, E., Regner, N., 2016. Students’ perception of “good” and “bad” teachers—results of a qualitative thematic analysis with German adolescents. Int. J. Educ. Res. 75, 31–44.
Said, E.W., 1978. Orientalism. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Salehi, A., 2010. The study of relationship among personality factors (introversion, extroversion) of students and their effects to selecting a good teacher. Proc. Soc. Behav. Sci. 2, 4016–4020.
Simpson, S.T., 2008. Western EFL teachers and east-west classroom-culture conflicts. RELC J. 39 (3), 381–394.
Southern New Hampshire University, August, 2021, 10 qualities of a good teacher. https://www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/2017/12/qualities-of-a-good-teacher.
Tran, L.H.N., 2015. Vietnamese students’ perception of English teacher qualities: implications for teacher professional development. Int. J. Acad. Res. Educ. Rev. 3 (1), 7–19. http://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJAREndex/htm.
Yu, E., Balslevina, Frolova, S.V., Lebedeva, I.V., 2018. Top Qualities of Great Teachers: National and Universal. Springer International Publishing AG, pp. 44–52.