



What are the Features of Quality for Arabic Teachers Agreed by Students and Teachers?

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Abstract

Teacher is an important factor swaying students' achievement. The success of an educational entity reflects the quality of the teachers engaged. Teacher factor is identified as one of the main obstacles to the Arabic education. Assessment process of the teachers' quality would help those concerned identify the weakness before preventive and remedial actions being taken. This study intends to identify the features of quality for Arabic teachers agreed by students and teachers as the first step in a continuous assessment of the teachers' quality. The respondents of the qualitative approach are 9 excellent Arabic teachers and 90 students from SMKA throughout Malaysia. The qualitative data are analyzed through descriptive and comparative methods using the Atlas.ti. installer. The finding of this study regarding the experiences of excellent Arabic teachers shows that there are 17 GBA quality characteristics that are seen in 4 categories, i.e. 1) Personality, 2) Assessment and Feedback, 3) Class and Student Management, and 4) Teaching and Learning (T&L). The outcome also uncovers types of similarity and difference in determining the teachers' quality based on teacher and student perspective. The teachers are found as leaning to more comprehensive assessment compared to the students who prioritize the quality of a good teacher-student relationship.

Keywords: Teacher quality, Quality characteristics, Arabic education, Comprehensive assessment, Teaching and learning, Arabic teachers.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study identifies the features of quality for Arabic teachers agreed by students and teachers as the first step in a continuous assessment of the teachers' quality.

1. Introduction

Among the factors that influence the performance of students in learning, teachers are among the main players and the key to learning success. This can be seen and acknowledged by scholars in recent years. This declaration is supported by the current study, which indicated that the quality of teachers beyond the effectiveness of other variables that influence student achievement (Akbari & Alivar, 2010; Andrews & Crawford, 2012; Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs, & Robinson, 2004; Goe, 2007; Kelcey, 2011; Thang, Gobel, Nor, & Suppiah, 2011). Goe (2007) emphasized that the importance of teachers' quality in terms of achievement of students has reached a general agreement worldwide. In fact, a recent value-added model study, in measuring the effectiveness of teachers, is based on the theory of the relationship between the quality of a teacher and the achievement of students (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). Thus, the question about the quality of teachers and their effectiveness is always raised and given special attention as a factor that affects student learning (Walsh, 2001).

2. Literature Review

The concept of quality teachers is also constantly evolving and changing from time to time. It is difficult to get consensus on understanding the concept of quality. In fact, previous studies have proven that researchers understand the concept of teacher quality differently when forming and assessing teacher performance and quality (Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006).

Despite the differences in concept among researchers, there is almost a point between them regarding the effect of teacher quality on student achievement (Goe, 2007; Walsh, 2001). Studies show that students who are handed over to effective / qualified teachers will have the highest achievement level compared to those under poor quality teachers (Patterson, 2010). While defining the quality of the teacher is not easy, but there is enough evidence that correlates the quality with the effectiveness of the teacher and the extent to which a student practices his or her learning (Patterson, 2010; Walsh, 2001).

The difference in teacher quality concepts can be seen in some previous studies. Walsh (2001); Smith and Gorard (2007) in their study stated that teacher quality is closely related to the ability of teachers affects student learning to a more positive direction. Hence, for them, the quality of teachers is associated with cognitive and verbal abilities of teachers. These two aspects are a teacher factor that can affect the learning environment of students. This is because all teacher's response is derived from the process of observing and understanding the behavior and responses shown by the students. At the same time, a teacher also chooses, and filters certain teaching methods based on different subject content (content-based pedagogy). In addition, the presentation also completed cognitive abilities so that any cognitive planning can meet its goals. Herein lies the importance of cognitive and verbal abilities in a teacher. Thus, for some researchers, teacher quality is measured in terms of cognitive and verbal. Some of these statements are supported by the conclusions of Fuller, Young, and Baker (2010) from some previous studies that the verbal ability of a teacher is one of the consistent character of teachers showing a close relationship with the achievement of students. The concept of teacher quality has often defined as a good lesson (Walsh, 2001). Burnett and Meacham (2002) argued that teacher quality can be achieved when a teacher produces an effective teaching atmosphere in the classroom. This effectiveness means controlling and operating the class successfully. This concept also refers to the terms of teachers' competency (Abd Shukor, 2001). This view considers the career of teachers who are basically teaching in the classroom. Therefore, Ahmad (2008) emphasized that there was a need to obtain a picture of the situation in the classroom between teachers and students as one of the efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Despite the idealism of this view, there is a certain difficulty in retaining the emphasis on teaching as a teacher's quality proxy. So far, research has not fully succeeded to identify teaching methods in the classroom to improve student achievement in specific. These characters are difficult or almost impossible to measure. Unfortunately, that is the information most needed by the administration and policy makers in the field of education (Cavalluzzo, 2004; Goe & Stickler, 2008; Lavy, 2011).

In Malaysia, many studies have argued about the quality of Arabic teacher directly or indirectly (see, (Ashinida, Afendi, & Mohd, 2004; Muhammad & Samah, 2007; Nik & Kamarulzaman, 2008; Sumaiyah, 2011)). These studies, though, do not touch the whole aspect of the Arabic language teacher, but it gives an overview of existing quality problems among Arabic language teachers. Therefore, Nik and Kamarulzaman (2008) concluded that the problem of qualified Arabic teachers is one of the three major obstacles in the Arabic language education in Malaysia. Quality assessment will help the parties identify the exact point of the weakness before any precautionary measures and treatments are taken. Hanna and Gimbert (2011) proposes three key steps of teacher quality assessment. (1) Identifying dimensions in teacher quality (2) Building instruments, and (3) Building and testing teacher quality models. The teacher's quality evaluation process will help the parties identify weaknesses before the precautions and treatment are taken. The study aims to explore the characteristics of a quality Arabic teacher from the perspective of students and teachers in Malaysia.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative study using a questionnaire instrument. A total of 90 respondents were students and 9 Arabic teachers were selected from SMKA throughout Malaysia. Qualitative data was analyzed using descriptive approach using Atlas.ti software. The five (5) qualitative data analysis cycles by Yin (2011) were used in the data analysis process; namely (1) compilation of data, (2) resolution of data, (3) restructuring, (4) interpretation, and (5) conclusions. The data analysis cycle showed in Figure 1.

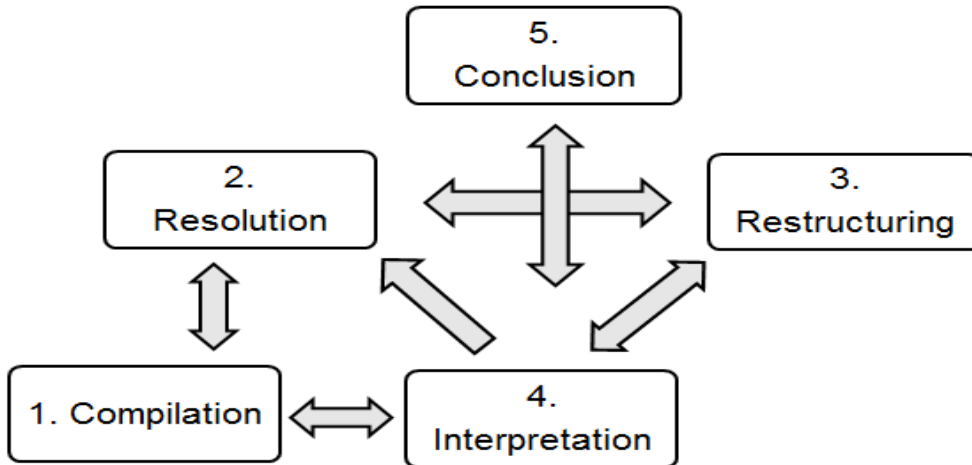


Figure-1. Five (5) qualitative data analysis cycles

Source: Yin (2011).

The findings of qualitative studies will be analyzed descriptively by focusing on the patterns found. The determination of this pattern will consider the frequency of items within most respondents, i.e. five or more respondents. This is to adopt the nature of exploration qualitative study which is generally aimed to find out the pattern of study findings as a guide and model.

4. Findings

A total of 81 original themes were found in respondent feedback. All 81 themes were categorized into 4 categories based on the categorization obtained from the literature review. These 4 categories include personality, knowledge and credibility, good relationship with students and teaching. In the analysis of the findings, 1:10 approval rate was also used in the selection of the required data retrieval. Therefore, themes that do not meet the rate have been set aside from the conclusions in the final findings. The findings include 10 quality features of Arabic teachers shared by teachers and students. Refer to Figure 2 This means that teachers and students in their feedback have mutually agreed that a quality Arabic teacher should have a list of these qualities. 10 quality features charted in the figure according to the categories that have been set during the analysis.

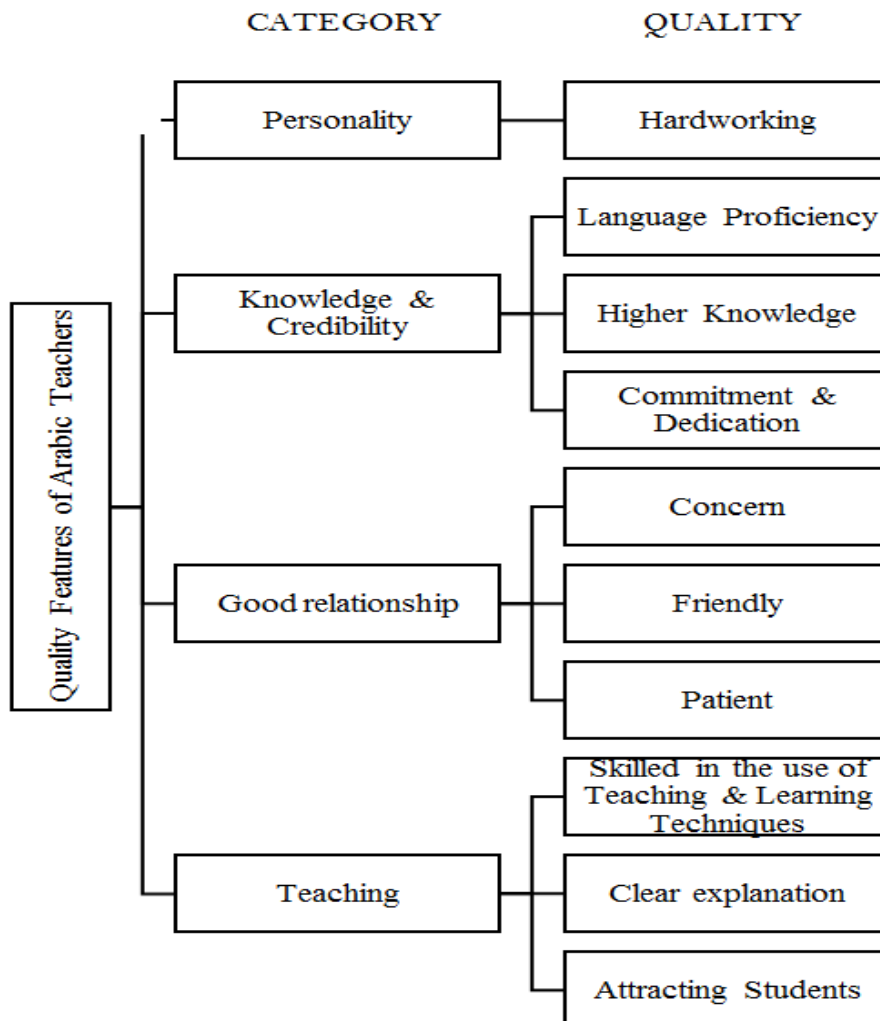


Figure-2. Quality features of Arabic language teachers by teachers and students.

The study also found that there were 21 features of the quality that became the difference point between teacher and student respondents. 7 quality features were only expressed through student feedback, while 14 quality features were only expressed by teacher respondents. Refer to Figures 3 and Figure 4.

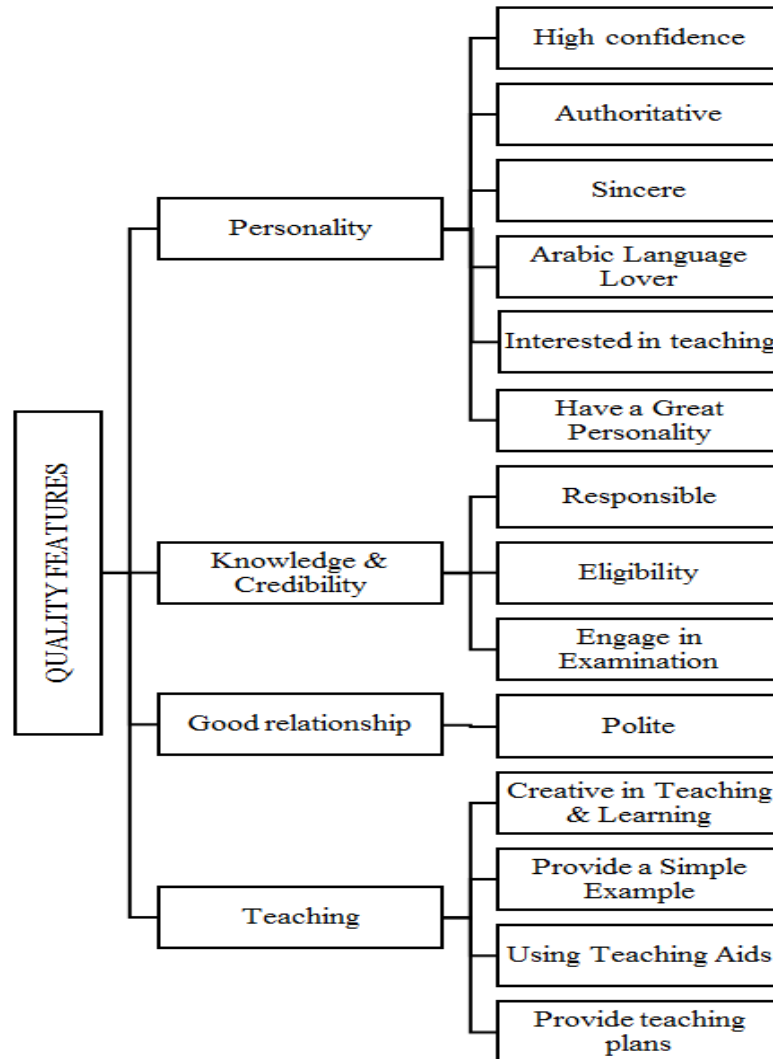


Figure-3. Quality features of Arabic language teachers by teacher respondents.

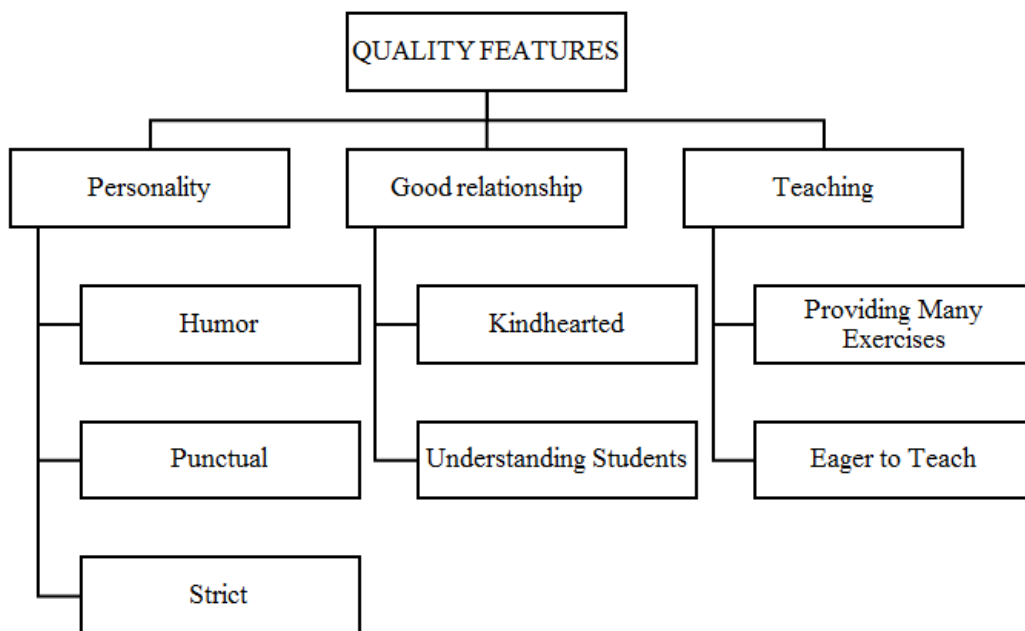


Figure-4. Quality features of Arabic language teachers by student respondents.

Based on Figure 3 Quality Features of Arabic Language Teachers by Teacher Respondents, there are 14 important features considered by the teacher respondents as a feature of a quality Arabic teacher in four categories, namely personality, knowledge and credibility, good relationship and teaching. Whereas, Figure 4 Quality Features of Arabic Language Teachers by Student Respondents show the 7 qualities of the Arabic language teachers according to the students' perceptions. These 7 features are placed in just three categories namely, personality, good relationship and teaching.

5. Findings Discussion

The findings of the teacher's quality show the diversity of aspects seen as representing the quality constructs of Arabic Language teachers. Constructive responses enable the creation of 4 main categories, namely personality, knowledge and credibility, good relationship with students and teaching. This is shared jointly by teacher and student respondents. Widespread findings and across several different aspects can be referred to the statements of some education scholars on terms of teacher quality. They think that the term of teacher quality is a multi-dimensional concept (Blanton et al, 2006; Burnett & Meacham, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Goe & Stickler,

2008). Hence, there is no consensus among scholars or policy makers about the meaning and concept of the quality of teachers or qualified teachers (Abd Shukor, 2001; Blanton et al., 2006; Brosh, 1996; Burnett & Meacham, 2002; Goe., 2007). The formation of 4 different categories in teacher quality assessment is in line with this theory.

While normal constructs in social science such as education have complex and diverse structures, there is a tendency among researchers to limit the concept of quality to one or more specific aspects. Value-added model, for example, is used in teacher quality study to identify the quality defined as the effectiveness of teachers on student achievement (Goe., 2007; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). At the same time, the findings of this study have taken advantage of the multi-dimensional nature of constructs by combining several dimensions such as personality, knowledge and credibility, good relationship with students and teaching. Each dimension represents a part of the quality construct. Merger or involvement of various dimensions have been shared by some researchers conducting studies on teacher education. Hanna and Gimbert (2011) have suggested that researchers conducting a study on teacher quality build a comprehensive and holistic teacher quality model. Blanton et al. (2006) also argue that traditional studies that rely solely on understanding the quality of teachers need to be incorporated in some form of measurement. In the same context, Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) have involved two quality dimensions simultaneously, namely good teaching and effective teaching.

Although respondents have incorporated several dimensions in the quality assessment of Arabic language teachers, there are important dimensions that are not directly submitted based on the findings of the survey respondents. Findings do not consider student achievement as a measure of quality assessments directly. This should be seen seriously. This is because students' achievement is considered as a result of teacher's teaching, but it does not stand out based on perceptions of teacher and student respondents. Such isolation is expected. According to Goe and Stickler (2008) teacher quality is often understood as a single teacher character. Teacher character is what the teacher shows when teaching in the classroom. Therefore, teacher character is rarely measured with student achievement. Student achievement is an important dimension in teacher assessment. According to Goe. (2007) the quality of the teacher contains three important points. Input, process and output. Student achievement is the only indicator of teacher quality output. Authorities or policy makers are third parties in Arabic language education besides teachers and students. If teachers and students do not care about student achievement, then the authorities will be vice versa. Education authorities are seen more likely to be such assessments. This is because the results of a quality study based on student achievement are more consistent and easier to interpret. Furthermore, data on teachers and students were kept in the records of the parties concerned to facilitate the assessment made directly and quickly (Blanton et al., 2006). The quality assessment of Arabic Language teachers without regard to student achievement would have difficulty being implemented or accepted when involving education authorities such as the Ministry, State Education Department or administrators at the school level.

Based on the research by Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) the quality of teachers should incorporate good teaching and effective teaching. Overall research findings from respondents include personality, knowledge and credibility, good relationship and teaching without student achievement are closer to good teaching assessment. Hence, the quality features of Arabic language teachers in the study needs to be clear and it refers only to good teaching, which represents part of the quality construct of the Arabic language teacher, not as a whole.

The first category, which represents several features Arabic teacher quality is the personality of the teacher. An overview of the past teacher quality study shows that the personality category has been found either inductive or deductive. It is sometimes expressed in terms of personality or personal features. There are many studies that put personality as a category in the quality of teachers (Abd Shukor, 2001; Chen & Lin, 2009; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Jun, 2012; Kamarul, 2010; Lee, 2010; Shahril, 2002; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009).

In addition, most of the features covered by this category have also been confirmed in cross-dated through the findings of previous studies. High-confidence features (Akbari & Alivar, 2010; Demmon-Berger, 1986) authoritative (Barnes & Lock, 2010) loves language or subject (Andrews & McNeill, 2005; Borg, 2006) interested in teaching (Akbari & Alivar, 2010; Jun, 2012; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, & Minor, 2001) sincere (Kamarul, 2010) hardworking (Jun, 2012; Shahril, 2002) humor (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Jun, 2012; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Park & Lee, 2006; Shahril, 2002) and strict (Shahril, 2002). Whereas, punctual and have a great personality are discovery of new features that researchers have not found in the literature review on teacher quality. However, there are some features in the literature related to time management (Shahril, 2002) which can be referred to punctuality.

Knowledge and credibility are one of the categories of quality assessments of Arabic language teachers derived from the findings of this study. This category has compiled some quality features from teacher and student respondents. In addition to this study, there are other studies that also suggest such categories as the study by Barnes and Lock (2010); Faranda and Clarke (2004) and Witcher et al. (2001).

The quality features encompassed by the category of knowledge and credibility have been supported or highlighted in a series of other teacher quality studies. Except for a feature found in the findings of a teacher's respondent involved in the supervision of the large examination. This feature is a new finding in this study and was not found by researchers from the literature review. Meanwhile, other quality features, there are also shared by the findings of the previous study. The quality feature of the knowledge and credibility of the language teacher is responsible (Hinai, 2011; Jun, 2012; Kamarul, 2010) has the qualifications (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Hinai, 2011), proficiency in the target language (Andrews & McNeill, 2005; Bell, 2005; Hinai, 2011; Jun, 2012; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Park & Lee, 2006; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009) have a high knowledge of the subject (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Bell, 2005; Brosh, 1996; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Koutsoulis, 2003; Lang, McKee, & Conner, 1993; Mullock, 2003; Park & Lee, 2006; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009) and commitment as well as dedication when doing the task (Hinai, 2011; Kamarul, 2010; Shahril, 2002).

In addition to personality, knowledge and credibility, teacher and student respondents, it also sets the relationship between teachers and students' part of the Arabic language teacher's quality concept. This finding is in line with the findings of other studies which also recognize the relationship between the quality concepts of teachers. Among the studies that presented this category are Barnes and Lock (2010); Chen and Lin (2009); Faranda and Clarke (2004); Koutsoulis (2003) and Lowman (1996). These studies reinforce the good relationship between teachers and students through qualitative data analysis of the respondents.

In the category of good relations between teachers and students, there are 6 features contained in the respondent group and the features are mutually agreed. 5 of them are also found in the literature, thereby verifying the findings of the study. The good relationship that is confirmed is concern for students (Andrews & McNeill, 2005; Barnes & Lock, 2010; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Jun, 2012; Kamarul, 2010; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Park & Lee, 2006; Shahril, 2002; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009) be friendly with them (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Hinai, 2011; Jun, 2012; Kamarul, 2010; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Park & Lee, 2006; Wichadee, 2010b) kindhearted (Jun, 2012) and understand the students (Andrews & McNeill, 2005; Barnes & Lock, 2010; Jun, 2012; Kamarul, 2010; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Lang et al., 1993; Park & Lee, 2006; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009). However, the relationship between teachers and students which is only expressed by the teacher respondents was not getting a place in the previous literature review. This feature can be considered as a new discovery. The feature is polite, that refers to the civility and decency in speech and behavior. The researcher believes that the quality assessment in terms of the good relationship between teachers and students using this feature is related to the culture among the Malay community which emphasizes the elements of politeness. A quality teacher is a teacher with courtesy and politeness. The concept of teacher quality is certainly not separated from the quality of teaching that is the cornerstone of the teaching profession. Therefore, teacher quality assessment through teaching aspect as agreed by the respondents of teachers and students is not a foreign reality in the teaching study. The quality features of the Arabic language teacher explored, partly referring to the teaching or presentation of the subject. There are many studies that use the teaching category as one of the teachers' quality assessments. Among them are Chen and Lin (2009); Demmon-Berger (1986); Faranda and Clarke (2004); Jun (2012); Kamarul (2010); Koutsoulis (2003); Lee (2010); Shahril (2002) and Witcher et al. (2001). Such studies use a variety of terms that are almost identical to their meaning. Teaching, Teaching and Learning, delivery and others. There are 9 quality features that describe the quality of Arabic language teaching in this study. All these features have been supported by many literatures. This suggests that the quality of teaching has gained consensus among researchers through the listing of its quality features. 9 features of teaching quality as well as the findings of the previous research are consistent with the following items, creative in teaching and learning (Borg, 2006; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009) provide a simple example (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Kamarul, 2010) using teaching aids (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Hinai, 2011; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Park & Lee, 2006) always provide teaching plans (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Brosh, 1996; Jun, 2012; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Park & Lee, 2006; Wichadee, 2010a, 2010b) skilled in the use of teaching and learning techniques (Andrews & McNeill, 2005; Barnes & Lock, 2010; Borg, 2006; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Jun, 2012; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Mullock, 2003; Park & Lee, 2006) describes a clear lesson (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Jun, 2012; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Shahril, 2002) teaching practices that attract students (Brosh, 1996; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Koutsoulis, 2003; Lowman, 1996; Park & Lee, 2006) provide many exercises (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Shahril, 2002) and the last feature of teaching quality is that teachers are always excited, especially when teaching (Barnes & Lock, 2010; Borg, 2006; Jun, 2012; Khojastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009; Lee, 2010). Thus, there is no discovery on the quality features of the new Arabic language teacher in this category. The research on the findings of the Arabic language teacher features indicates that the list of features contains most of the items often found in the list of universal features for the quality of a teacher. Features such as concern, humorous nature, giving clear explanations and an easy example are the quality features of Arabic language teachers and at the same time, they are also included in the literature on the quality of a teacher in general. This finding is consistent with the literature review by Lee (2010) which stated that most of the findings of the previous study did not differentiate the special features of language teachers and general features of teachers across various subjects. This is justified by Borg (2006) that the list of such mixtures is not uncommon because the language teacher is a teacher as well. Thus, Arabic language teachers also share the universal features of teachers.

The findings also illustrate the differences between teacher and student assessment on the quality of Arabic language teachers. This distinction is normal as the past study on teacher quality also recognizes the different perceptions of teachers and students. Among the findings are the study by Brosh (1996); Lang et al. (1993); Park and Lee (2006); Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) and Wichadee (2010b).

In addition to the different concepts of the quality of language teachers derived from two groups of respondents, there is a tendency pattern shown in their responses. It is found that teachers' respondents show quality characteristics in terms of personality, knowledge and credibility as well as greater and comprehensive quantitative teaching. The quantities proposed by the respondents of the teacher are more evaluated as compared to the quantities proposed by the student respondents. This trend is also found in other studies. The study by Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) for example, stated that teachers tend to choose features related to teaching and pedagogy compared to student respondents. Brosh (1996) also noticed the same thing. He noted that the teacher group emphasized teaching based on research and stimulated students' motivation. Similar tones were detected in the discussion of findings by Hinai (2011). He found that teacher respondents have given more credit to many effective teaching features than the students studied.

In addition to the pattern of teachers' tendency in the assessment of the quality of language teachers, the findings also reveal the pattern of student tendencies. This tendency is apparent in the selection of teacher quality features across the categories that are being built. Generally, students do not assess the quality of Arabic language proficiency in depth. The number of features considered as indicators of student respondents is less than the amount specified by the teachers. This can be seen clearly through the comparison of features in each quality. However, it happens in the category of good relations between teachers and students. The quality features of the students are more than teachers. This shows that students tend to evaluate the quality of language teachers through the quality of relationships between teachers and students. At the same time, this tendency affects quality features in other categories such as personality. Student respondents have chosen features of teacher personality qualities related to students such as humor and firm against students.

However, this conclusion is not uncommon when considering the literature review. The characteristics of teacher quality that are directly related to them have been the priorities of student respondents in many studies and are realized by researchers such as Barnes and Lock (2010); Brosh (1996); Chen and Lin (2009); Lang et al. (1993); Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) and Wichadee (2010b). Barnes and Lock (2010) found that students have considered

the nature of teachers in the relationship category between teachers and students is most important to them. Meanwhile, the second most important category is the delivery and teaching techniques. There are other studies found that in the students' view, the nature of the relationship between teachers and students is as important as teaching or other categories (Brosh, 1996; Lang et al., 1993; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; Wichadee, 2010b).

6. Conclusion

The teacher's quality theory is widely discussed with various definitions and interpretations (Al-Muslim & Arifin, 2015; Al-Muslim. & Arifin, 2014; Ariffin & al-Muslim, 2015). The scholars are trying to understand and take the difference and diversity of theories as the foundation in the study of teaching assessments. The findings of this study can be regarded as support for some of the theories that have been promoted. Support through scientific research is a part of merit that helps the development and selection of research conducted by scholars and researchers in the field based on the theory.

The study has reinforced the multi-dimensional theory of teacher quality concepts (Blanton et al., 2006; Burnett & Meacham, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Goe & Stickler, 2008). The finding clearly demonstrates how a concept of quality is understood by teachers and students in various forms. This denies the use of one dimension in quality assessment of language teachers. Such as the use of student qualification or results as a quality indicator is often performed. The study also confirmed the theory of assessment differences between teachers and students. These differences have been said in the previous literature (Brosh, 1996; Lang et al., 1993; Park & Lee, 2006; Shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009; Wichadee, 2010b). Thus, the study also found the same thing. At the same time, the findings also reveal the pattern of differences underlying quality assessment by teachers and students. This disclosure provides important guidance to the relevant parties to implement the teacher quality evaluation process, especially Arabic language teachers. Appropriate assessment will increase the reliability of the results obtained.

The additional implications contributed by the findings are the discovery of several new indicator items representing constructs. Items such as courteous, involvement and contribution in the field of Arabic language education are inventions that are not identified by researchers in the literature review. Items such as punctuality also further the purposes of the time management specified in the literature (Shahril, 2002). This adds information about quality theory and indicator items.

Policymakers covering education institutions, universities and ministries should see the assessment of Arabic language teachers from the local context and involve the perspectives of teachers and students. This involves policy formulation, education system, assessment and review. In addition to teachers and students, further studies may involve third parties in the Arabic language education system, namely the administration or the authorities. The administration includes school principals, head of committee or ministry representative. As one of the stakeholders, of course they have their own perceptions in understanding the concept of quality for Arabic language teachers. This perception underlies several administrative measures such as the selection of excellent teachers, promotion and teacher selection in multilateral Arabic language academic affairs, including the construction of questions, examinations, Teaching and Learning workshops and others. Therefore, exploration of quality features through them has its own significance, whether qualitative or quantitative research.

At the same time, the quality assessment of Arabic language teachers should also contribute to the improvement of teaching practices. Therefore, a mechanism should be structured so that the teachers get the biggest benefit from a quality assessment carried out. Avoid the reliance of assessment on things beyond the context of Teaching and Learning alone. According to Darling-Hammond (2009) the problem of teacher quality measurement today is that measurements are often not associated with teaching ability. The authorities particularly dependent on the principal statement, record of courses taken or the results of the test of skills and general knowledge on the subject. All these indicators are very weak to describe the effectiveness and performance in the classroom. According to her, despite the importance of the teacher's knowledge, skill and others, it all depends on how the teacher handles the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

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