# Perceptions of Effective and Ineffective Teaching: Insights From Students

**Pär Löfstrand**
**Mid Sweden University**

**Ulrik Terp**
**Karlstad University**

*The aim of this study was to assess how students perceive teacher behaviors. The participants, responded to a survey consisting of a short version of the Teacher Behavior Checklist (TBC). The result revealed five dimensions of teacher behavior. We named these dimensions Superlative/Superhuman, Pro-social, Professional, Absent, and Insecure. The positive dimensions, superlative and pro-social had the highest overall rankings, and professional came third. The two negative aspects were behaviors that the students associated with negative teacher behaviors. The analysis revealed differences according to gender as female students rated four of the five dimensions as more important. There were also differences according to educational level. Students at Upper secondary school students rated the pro-social dimension with characteristics, such as, good listener, relation builder and understanding higher. University students had lower tolerance for the absent dimension and stressed the behaviors associated with improving critical thinking skills when compared to the younger sample.*

*Keywords: Teacher Behavioral Checklist, university students, upper secondary school, teaching*

## INTRODUCTION

As authors of this study, we bring over twenty years of collective teaching experience at both upper secondary school and university levels. Our background encompasses instructing students from diverse disciplines, educational backgrounds, and instructional formats, with a particular emphasis on psychology. Throughout our journey, we have encountered various challenges across different contexts, yet we've also shared many rewarding moments with our students. Being a psychology educator demands a multifaceted skill set, as navigating through the array of student expectations can often prove challenging. Based on our collective experiences, it becomes evident that excelling as a psychology professor entails more than mere subject expertise. Beyond being motivated and well-versed in the subject matter, proficiency in social dynamics, advanced communication abilities, intellectual rigor, professionalism, and other qualities are indispensable. In this study, we aim to explore the interplay and perceptions of these diverse characteristics among students of varying genders and educational levels within a Swedish educational setting.

In a previous study, Davis (2002), students from the USA were tasked with identifying three key attributes they deemed essential in a teacher. This yielded a compilation of 47 traits. Subsequently, another group of 184 students was enlisted to prioritize these traits, resulting in the identification of 28 items that formed what is now known as the Teacher Behavior Checklist (TBC), as detailed by Keeley et al. (2006).

In a comprehensive study focused on validating various assessment tools gauging students' perceptions of teaching, Spooren et al. (2013) concluded that the TBC, along with several other instruments, demonstrated high levels of validity. Additionally, prior investigations have explored potential gender disparities in students' perceptions of effective and ineffective teaching (Basow, 2000; Boring, 2017). These studies indicate that expectations placed on teachers are generally consistent regardless of students' gender. Both female and male students emphasize the importance of teachers being caring and knowledgeable. Experimental evidence further underscores the pivotal role of a teacher's enthusiasm in student engagement (Patrick et al., 2000; Peng, 2021).

In earlier research examining perceptions of poor teaching, Busler et al. (2017) identified qualities and behaviors such as disrespectfulness, providing unfair and biased student assessments, setting unrealistic expectations for learning, lacking expertise in course content, and demonstrating inadequate communication skills as the most reported concerns. Similarly, in a recent study by Zayac et al. (2021), disrespectfulness emerged as the primary perceived trait of ineffective teachers, with weak rapport also being highlighted as another significant indicator of ineffective teaching.

In a study conducted within a Chinese context by Liu et al. (2020), while there were notable similarities with earlier American studies when employing the Teacher Behavior Checklist (TBC), differences were also observed. One such distinction was that the Chinese sample identified unfair treatment of students as a characteristic of ineffective teaching, a perspective not commonly highlighted in previous studies from the United States.

The objective of this study was to explore how Swedish students, spanning both upper secondary school and university levels, perceive the key attributes of effective and ineffective teaching by utilizing the Teacher Behavior Checklist (TBC)

## METHODLOGY

Participants: A total of 399 students took part in the study, comprising 205 women, 174 men, with 20 participants opting not to respond. Among them, 206 were from an upper secondary school, while 193 were university students. The mean age of the students in the upper secondary school group was 17.38 years, whereas university students had a mean age of 27.98 years. Participants were enrolled in diverse educational programs with a focus on behavioral and social sciences. The Teacher Behavior Checklist (TBC), consisting of 28 items that assess various teacher characteristics exhibited through behaviors, was employed (Davis, 2002). These items have undergone extensive analysis by researchers such as Baiocco & DeWaters (1998), Lowman (1996), and Patrick et al. (2000).

Materials: The Teacher Behavior Checklist (TBC) comprises 28 items assessing various teacher behaviors. Participants were requested to evaluate each item using a five-point Likert scale. They responded to a Swedish version of the TBC, slightly modified to inquire about the perceived importance of qualities for being a good teacher, rather than assessing individual teachers directly.

Statistical Analysis: Factor analysis was employed to explore the relationships between various characteristics. Following this, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to investigate potential differences in factor evaluations based on gender or educational level.

## RESULTS

The factor analysis unveiled the possibility of both a one-factor and a five-factor solution. The one-factor solution yielded factor loadings ranging from .33 to .71 for each item, with the majority exceeding .5 (Table 1). This factor encompassed all 28 items, and no rotation was performed due to the singular factor involved. The essence of this factor can be summarized as "good teaching," representing a unified construct where each item contributes to various facets of this overarching concept.

**TABLE 1**
**ITEM LOADING, ONE FACTOR SOLUTION**

| Item | Total scale |
|---|---|
| Promotes critical thinking/intellectually stimulating | .71 |
| Rapport | .68 |
| Punctuality/manages class time | .63 |
| Confident | .61 |
| Promotes class discussion | .61 |
| Provides constructive feedback | .61 |
| Professional | .61 |
| Encourages and cares for students | .60 |
| Prepared | .59 |
| Happy/positive attitude/humor | .58 |
| Effective communicator | .56 |
| Authoritative | .55 |
| Humble | .54 |
| Establishes daily and academic term goals | .54 |
| Accessible | .54 |
| Creative and interesting | .50 |
| Understanding | .49 |
| Realistic expectations of students/fair testing grading | .49 |
| Presents current information | .48 |
| Respectful | .47 |
| Knowledgeable about subject | .47 |
| Enthusiastic about teaching and about topic | .46 |
| Strives to be a better teacher | .44 |
| Good listener | .44 |
| Flexible/open-minded | .44 |
| Technologically competent | .44 |
| Sensitive and Persistent | .38 |
| Approachable/personable | .33 |

**Five Factor Model**

The initial unrotated factor analysis revealed the presence of five factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, a criterion accepted in line with Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan (2003). The first factor ($\lambda_1 = 8.39$) accounted for 29.62% of the variance, followed by the second ($\lambda_2 = 1.95$) contributing to 6.95% of the total variance, the third ($\lambda_3 = 1.77$) explaining 6.32% of the variance, the fourth ($\lambda_4 = 1.43$) representing 5.13% of the variance,

and the fifth ($\lambda_5 = 1.25$) covering 4.46% of the variance. Monte Carlo studies on factor extractions utilizing random data reveal that expected values for the first five components with 300 cases and 30 items are 1.64, 1.56, 1.48, 1.42, and 1.37, respectively (Lautenschlager, 1989). Subsequently, our second factor analysis employed the maximum likelihood extraction method with Oblimin nonorthogonal rotation, anticipating correlated factors.

**TABLE 2**
**ITEM LOADINGS FIVE FACTOR SOLUTION**

| Item | Superlative | Pro-social | Absent | Professional | insecure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Provides Constructive Feedback | .75 | | | | |
| Realistic Expectations of Students/Fair Testing and Grading | .64 | | | | |
| Respectful | .58 | | | | |
| Humble | .55 | | | | |
| Knowledgeable | .54 | | | | |
| Strives to Be a Better Teacher | .52 | | | | |
| Good Listener | .52 | | | | |
| Enthusiastic About Teaching and About Topic | .50 | | | | |
| Sensitive and Persistent | .48 | | | | |
| Accessible | .34 | | | | |
| Rapport (makes class laugh | | .79 | | | |
| Happy/positive | | .66 | | | |
| Encourages and cares | | .64 | | | |
| Understanding | | .55 | | | |
| Flexible/open minded | .48 | .42 | | | |
| Promotes critical thinking | | | -.87 | | |
| Promotes class discussion | | | -.64 | | |
| Establishes Daily and Term Goals | | | -.50 | .42 | |
| Punctuality | | | | .69 | |
| Prepared | | | | .66 | |
| Professional | | | | .55 | |
| Presents Current Information | | | | .50 | |
| Technologically Competent | | | | .49 | |
| Confident | | | | | -.71 |
| Effective Communicator | .51 | | | | -.64 |
| Authoritative | | | | | -.57 |
| Approachable | .43 | | | | -.53 |
| Creative and Interesting | .45 | | | | -.47 |

The five-factor model comprises two factors delineating positive attributes, one factor representing formal characteristics, and two factors embodying negative attributes. The largest factor, Factor 1 ($l_1$), which contributes significantly to the model, encompasses an array of positive traits, both emotional and professional in nature. Achieving proficiency in these traits would require one to embody an exceptional level of teaching prowess, akin to that of a superlative teacher. Factor 2 encompasses four pro-social

attributes or "emotional characteristics." Factor 3 consists of non-emotional yet formal positive attributes. Factor 4 encompasses three negative characteristics, indicative of an absent and/or fatigued teacher. Finally, Factor 5 comprises negative aspects reminiscent of an insecure teacher (refer to Table 2).

*Superlative Dimension: This* dimension earned its moniker of "superhuman" due to its extensive array of positive characteristics. To embody the qualities of a superhuman teacher, one must possess a blend of emotional intelligence, social adeptness, leadership prowess, and theoretical acumen, all while maintaining a vigilant presence in the classroom. This dimension entails providing constructive feedback, setting realistic expectations for students, ensuring fair grading, displaying respect and humility, possessing a wealth of knowledge, striving for continuous improvement, actively listening to students, exuding enthusiasm for teaching and the subject matter, demonstrating sensitivity and perseverance, being accessible and flexible, maintaining an open-minded approach, excelling in communication, fostering approachability, and, lastly, showcasing creativity and cultivating interest in the subject matter.

*Pro-Social Dimension:* The second dimension earned the label "pro-social" for its emphasis on positive behaviors and a keen understanding of students' needs. Traits within this dimension include fostering rapport, eliciting laughter in class, maintaining a cheerful and positive demeanor, offering encouragement and support, and demonstrating understanding towards students.

Professional Dimension: The third dimension encompasses a range of teacher characteristics, all vital for professional conduct. While these traits are attainable for most teachers, they require ongoing effort and motivation to cultivate. Characteristics within this dimension include setting daily and term goals, prioritizing punctuality, being well-prepared, maintaining professionalism, delivering up-to-date information, being technologically competent, and staying current with advancements in technology.

*Absent - Distant: This* dimension exhibited negative loadings on three items. It earned the name "absent - distant" as it evokes the image of a teacher who fails to stimulate class discussions and lacks goal-setting initiatives. Characteristics within this factor include a failure to promote critical thinking, an absence of encouragement for class discussion, and a lack of establishment of both daily and long-term goals.

*Insecure:* The fifth and final dimension encompasses negative perceptions related to five characteristics. We termed this dimension "insecure" as the traits associated with it evoke an image of an uncertain teacher. The items within this dimension include lack of confidence, ineffective communication, lack of authority, unapproachability, and a lack of creativity.

The highest mean values were observed in the first dimension, superlative, with a mean of 4.30, followed closely by "pro-social" with a mean of 4.10. In other words, these two factors were perceived as the most crucial attributes of a good teacher. Following these, professionalism got a mean of 3.83, surpassing the anticipated average of three. Conversely, the two negative factors, "absent" and "insecure," received low scores, with "absent" registering a mean of 1.95 and "insecure" a mean of 1.64, indicating an undesirable teacher archetype.

**TABLE 3**
**DIMENSIONS AND GENDER/EDUCATIONAL LEVEL**

| **Dimension** | **Total** | **Women** | **Men** | **University** | **Upper secondary** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *m* | *m* | *m* | *m* | *m* |
| Superlative | 4.30 | 4.36 | 4.23 | 4.30 | 4.30 |
| Pro-Social | 4.10 | 4.07 | 4.14 | 3.90 | 4.29 |
| Professional | 3.83 | 3.95 | 3.71 | 3.69 | 3.64 |
| Absent | 1.95 | 1.86 | 2.04 | 1.86 | 2.03 |
| Insecure | 1.64 | 1.55 | 1.64 | 1.60 | 1.67 |

Note: (n: Gender 379, Educational level 399)

## ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FACTORS AND GENDER, STUDY LEVEL

Subsequently, we conducted one-way ANOVAs to examine the impact of educational level (University vs. Upper Secondary School) on the various factors (see Table 5). A significant difference was discovered for the pro-social factor, where younger students rated this dimension significantly higher than university students (means = 4.29 and 3.90, respectively; $F(1, 399) = 31.24$, $p < .001$)

Among university students, professionalism received a significantly higher rating compared to upper secondary school students (means = 3.90 and 3.77, respectively; $F(1, 399) = 4.80$, $p < .05$). Additionally, a significant difference was observed, with upper secondary school students showing more tolerance towards an absent teacher compared to university students (means = 2.03 and 1.95, respectively; $F(1, 399) = 6.06$, $p < .05$)

**TABLE 4**
**DIMENSIONS AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

| **Dimension** | **Upper 2nd.** | **Uni.** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *m* | *m* | *f* |
| Superlative | 4.30 | 4.30 | *ns* |
| Pro-Social | 4.29 | 3.90 | 31.24 *** |
| Professionalism | 3.77 | 3.91 | 4.70 * |
| Absent | 2.03 | 1.95 | 6.06 * |
| Insecure | 1.67 | 1.63 | *ns* |

*** p<.001 * p<.05

Regarding gender differences, we identified significant distinctions across four of the five factors (See Table 5). Female students exhibited significantly higher expectations for the superlative factor compared to male students (means = 4.36 and 4.23, respectively; $F(1, 379) = 5.38$, $p < .05$).

Female students also achieved significantly higher scores on professionalism compared to male students (means = 3.95 and 3.71, respectively; $F(1, 379) = 12.37$, $p < .001$). Conversely, male students obtained higher scores on the absent factor than female students (means = 2.05 and 1.86, respectively; $F(1, 379) = 6.89$, $p < .05$). Additionally, male students achieved higher scores on the insecure factor compared to female students (means = 1.74 and 1.55, respectively; $F(1, 379) = 11.59$, $p < .001$)

**TABLE 5**
**DIMENSIONS AND GENDER**

| **Dimension** | **Women** | **Men** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *m* | *m* | *f* |
| Superlative | 4.36 | 4.23 | 5.38 * |
| Pro-Social | 4.07 | 4.14 | *ns* |
| Professionalism | 3.95 | 3,71 | 12.37*** |
| Absent | 1.86 | 2.05 | 6.89 * |
| Insecure | 1.55 | 1.74 | 11.59 *** |

*** p<.001 * p<.05

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions of items within the Teacher Behavior Checklist among a Swedish sample comprising students from various educational levels. Additionally, the study aimed to uncover any potential disparities based on educational level or gender.

The findings indicated that teachers, regardless of students' educational levels, are expected to possess a wide range of competencies. Five distinct dimensions emerged from the analysis. The primary dimension, termed, which we called superlative or "superhuman," encompassed 14 items of varying characteristics, such as providing constructive feedback, setting realistic expectations, displaying humility, active listening, and effective communication. The second factor, labeled "pro-social," comprised five items reflecting pro-social attributes, including fostering laughter, maintaining a positive demeanor, offering encouragement and support, understanding, and demonstrating flexibility and open-mindedness. The third dimension, denoted "professionalism," consisted of strictly professional attributes, such as setting goals, punctuality, preparedness, professionalism, delivering up-to-date information, and technological competence.

The fourth factor was labeled "Absent" as it comprised negative scores from three factors: promoting critical thinking, promoting class discussion, and establishing goals. Finally, the last factor was termed "Insecure" as it encompassed five negative loadings: lack of confidence, ineffective communication, lack of authority, unapproachability, and, lastly, lack of creativity and interest.

We find the five-factor model intriguing and informative. Every psychology professor and educator undoubtedly aspire to excel in the superlative factor. Being the largest factor, it encompasses various teaching skills and emotional traits, such as enthusiasm and social adeptness. We believe that continuous training is necessary for every teacher striving to enhance these attributes. This aligns with previous research findings. (Patrick et al., 2000; Peng, 2021).

The pro-social dimension also received high ratings, indicating that a pro-social teacher is well-regarded, particularly among upper secondary school pupils compared to university students. This finding may not come as a surprise. In upper secondary school settings, teachers bear greater responsibility for monitoring students' social well-being, a task that university professors typically do not have. With this responsibility comes the expectation to exhibit pro-social behaviors. However, despite the absence of explicit pro-social responsibilities for university teachers, students still consider pro-social qualities to be highly important. Drawing from our extensive experience as university educators, we believe that this aspect is often overlooked, not openly discussed, or even occasionally viewed negatively.

The dimension of professionalism was also highly regarded by the students. Interestingly, it was the only dimension where university students emphasized its importance to a greater extent than younger students. Attributes such as being well-prepared, maintaining professionalism, staying up to date, possessing technical proficiency, and being punctual are viewed as fundamental requirements for high-achieving, knowledge-driven, and occasionally stressed university students. The elevated expectations of university students regarding professionalism can be reasonably explained by the fact that these characteristics are vital for individuals who do not interact with their professors as frequently and often bear significant responsibility for their own learning. A lack of these factors in a professor can significantly impact the study environment negatively.

Two of the dimensions highlight characteristics that participants do not desire in a teacher. The first, "absent," conjures the image of a teacher who fails to foster critical thinking, engage in classroom discussions, or set clear goals. In this dimension, university students exhibited less tolerance compared to high school students, although the latter also viewed these traits negatively. The heightened importance attributed to these factors by university students likely stems from the same rationale as observed in the professionalism dimension. Regarding the fifth factor, "insecure," the combination of lack of confidence, poor communication, low authority, unapproachability, and lack of creativity poses a significant challenge in professional settings, particularly for teachers. This observation aligns with findings from current studies (Busler et al., 2017).

In summary, this study underscores the multifaceted nature of effective teaching, revealing variations in perceived importance based on educational level and gender. It emphasizes the significance of

understanding the unique needs and expectations of students. While teacher effectiveness is subjective, striving to excel as an educator demands adeptness in diverse skills and their discerning application in appropriate contexts.

To the best of our knowledge, this study marks the first utilization of the TBC in a Swedish context. Our findings diverge somewhat from the original research conducted by William Buskists and colleagues. It is not unexpected that cultural disparities within educational systems yield differences in students' perceptions of teachers. Much of the existing research in this field has been conducted within an American context. We anticipate that our study will contribute to a broader understanding of the TBC and provide a more balanced perspective between the US and other global contexts (Arnett, 2008).

Certainly, our study has limitations. We did not investigate how students' academic performance influences their perception of an effective teacher. However, the disparities between university students and younger students hint at the differing importance placed on pro-social characteristics and professionalism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finally, we would like to thank all our former students for giving us valuable knowledge on how to become better teachers.

## REFERENCES

Arnett, J.J. (2008). The neglected 95%: Why American psychology needs to become less American. *American Psychologist*, *63*(7), 602–614. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.7.602

Baiocco, S.A., & DeWaters, J.N. (1998). *Successful College Teaching: Problem-Solving Strategies of Distinguished Professors*. ERIC.

Basow, S.A. (2000). Best and worst professors: Gender patterns in students' choices. *Sex Roles*, *43*(5), 407–417. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00259.x

Boring, A. (2017). Gender biases in student evaluations of teaching. *Journal of Public Economics*, *145*, 27–41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2016.11.006

Busler, J., Kirk, C., Keeley, J., & Buskist, W. (2017). What constitutes poor teaching? A preliminary inquiry into the misbehaviors of not-so-good instructors. *Teaching of Psychology*, *44*(4), 330–334. https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628317727907

Davis, M.S. (2002). *An investigation of factors related to teacher retention in small rural school districts in Montana*. Montana State University.

Keeley, J., Smith, D., & Buskist, W. (2006). The teacher behaviors checklist: Factor analysis of its utility for evaluating teaching. *Teaching of Psychology*, *33*(2), 84–91. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15328023top3302_1

Lautenschlager, G.J. (1989). ALPHATST: Testing for differences in values of coefficient alpha. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, *13*(3).

Liu, S., Keeley, J.W., & Buskist, W. (2020). What constitutes poor teaching? Perspectives from Chinese college students. *Teaching of Psychology*, *47*(1), 58–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628319888091

Lowman, J. (1996). Characteristics of exemplary teachers. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, *65*, 33–40. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.37219966508

Omar, N.A., Matarsat, S.R., Azmin, N.H., Wei, V.C.A., Nasir, M.M.M., Sahari, U.K.S., . . . Darussalam, B. (2014). The ideal psychology teacher: Qualitative analysis of views from Brunei GCE A-Level students and trainee psychology teachers. *Asian Social Science*, *10*(12), 184–194. https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n12p184

Patrick, B.C., Hisley, J., & Kempler, T. (2000). "What's everybody so excited about?": The effects of teacher enthusiasm on student intrinsic motivation and vitality. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *68*(3), 217–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220970009600093

Peng, C.J. (2021). A conceptual review of teacher enthusiasm and students' success and engagement in Chinese EFL classes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, Article 742970. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.742970

Spooren, P., Brockx, B., & Mortelmans, D. (2013). On the validity of student evaluation of teaching the State of the Art. *Review of Educational Research*, *83*(4), 598–642.

Zayac, R.M., Poole, B.D., Gray, C., Sargent, M., Paulk, A., & Haynes, E. (2021). No disrespect: Student and faculty perceptions of the qualities of ineffective teachers. *Teaching of Psychology*, *48*(1), 55–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628320959978