

## Profiling an Ideal Teacher: Voices from Indonesian Vocational High School Students

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**Abstract.** The article presents the perceptions of Indonesian vocational high school students in defining an ideal teacher; what makes a teacher good and bad. This qualitative study employs in-depth interviews to obtain the data. The findings informed that an ideal teacher is the one who builds a positive relationship with the students, for instance, having an individual consideration, easy going, having a deep empathy, motivating, performing comprehensible teaching, enthusiastic, humorous, assertive, humble and patient. Moreover, this type of teacher will also be far from being injustice, antipathy, irresponsible, authoritarian, and short-tempered. Some pedagogical implications are implicitly discussed.

**Keywords :** *Indonesian vocational high school students, ideal teacher.*

### INTRODUCTION

Evaluative cultures towards the teachers' performance are ubiquitously happening. In a Kuwaiti Women's College, for instance, the students are actively engaged in evaluating their professors to establish as the good ones and the bad ones (Algharabali, Shuqair, and Almubayei, 2014). Likewise, Li and Wu (2011) conducted a comparative study about the personality patterns of good teachers and bad teachers in China. They concluded that they are quite different 'in the aspect of extroversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and dissimulation' (p. 760). Moreover, in German, Raufelder, Nitsche, Breitmeyer, Kebler, Herrmann, and Regner (2015) found that 'students prioritize teachers' (inter)personal dimensions over their academic abilities in everyday classroom interactions when evaluating them as educators' (p. 31). Even though determining teachers as an ideal figure is relatively vague since the individual standards for being good or bad are very wide and extensive depending on many aspects in diverse contexts, these three cases depict that assessing teachers' performance has become an interesting topic to discuss amongst students across the globe.

In Indonesia, there have been complex problems in relation to teachers. Sulisworo, Nasir & Maryani (2016) mention three major teachers' problems encountered by Indonesia; "low quality of teachers, lack of teacher welfare, and politicization of the teachers (p. 81)". These factors would definitely have influenced the students' learning motivation which result in the decrease of their quality of learning and impact on the quality of education. With this regard, unluckily, the first persons who will be very blamed, and responsible to solve those problems are teachers, since they are the main

actors in determining the face of education (Driel, Beijaard & Verloop, 2001). In addition, the effectiveness and quality of the teachers also play a very fundamental role in the success of the entire education system and especially students (Kavenuke, 2013).

The next concern is there are considerations between “good” and “bad” teachers in Indonesia. Generally, good teachers are the teachers who are able to implement learning goals properly and correctly to their students, in accordance with the main objectives of education itself. According to Strikwerda-Brown, Oliver, Hodgson, Palmer & Watts (2008), good teachers are the teachers who mentally challenge their students and are creative in terms of providing material clearly to their students and able to control the class so that all students feel comfortable and the atmosphere becomes effective in the classroom. In contrast, bad teachers are the teachers who have not been able to implement learning goals well to their students. In line with that, lack of capability and inability to meet the needs and interests of all students can be categorized as bad teachers (Strikwerda-Brown, et al., 2008, p. 39).

Knowing that many considerations present in deciding whether a teacher is good or bad in certain contexts, this study aims at investigating the students’ perception of an ideal teacher in the Indonesia, more specifically in the vocational high school setting. The study attempts to answer the research question, “what are the characteristics of an ideal teacher according to Indonesian vocational high school students?”

## **METHOD**

A descriptive case study was utilized as the research design. This type of case study is an empirical way to describe the natural phenomena that occur in questionable data (Zaenal, 2007). As claimed by Widodo (2013), the data in descriptive case study can be gathered through interviews, classroom observations, document artefacts (e.g., diaries, documents), therefore, this present study utilizes interviews as data collection technique. The participants of this study are five students in four classes from one of vocational high schools in Indonesia. There are two females and three males. They were selected according to their learning activeness in the English classroom and; 3 active students, and 2 relatively moderate. They were around 17 years old. A semi-structured interview guideline from Randolph and Blackburn (2000) was adopted to obtain the data. The guiding questions specifically addressed students’ perceptions of good and bad teachers and what makes them ideal. The interviews were conducted in a vocational high school in Indonesia. It was recorded and manually transcribed. In the process of transcriptions, all participants were assigned pseudonyms. The researcher analyzed the interviews by using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and inductively. This process requires transcribing interviews manually to become familiar with the data. Then, the initial code is generated and applied to the data set. Next, codes that display similar content are grouped together, producing themes that each describe ideal teachers. Then, reviewing - refining the main themes, and identifying sub-themes. Finally, the constructed themes are revised and improved.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **What makes a good teacher?**

#### ***Having an individual consideration, easy going, having a deep empathy***

According to the students’ narrations, some students considered that a good teacher is a teacher who is able to respond to the progress of class learning as a whole. Students expect

their teacher to repeat the materials, therefore, they really understand the materials presented. Following are some of the statements made by students:

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*“...hmm, the teacher not only focuses on the material but also focuses on their students. So, we can interact more, ask more questions, share experiences too.”*

(The result of interviewed/ N, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

*“Like my productive teacher at this school, the approach is through ... mmmm ... he tries to understand every student. For example, we are invited to talk, or socialize together we become connected because he understands what we want, what we need. So yes, we like it too.”*

(The result of interviewed/ L, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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Furthermore, the participants also revealed that good teachers also had to be able to play their role as friends. Other students' narration explained that if the teachers are friendly to their students, the students will also automatically be more friendly and welcome to their teachers.

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*“..... In addition, in my opinion the interaction between the teacher and students must also be friendly, closer.”*

(The result of interviewed /N, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“...a good teacher likes to embrace, gives advice and share. The point can be used as a place to confide so. For example, there are peculiarities in his/ her life, like to share experiences with the students. Vice versa, the students will also do the same thing to their teacher.”*

(The result of interviewed/T, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

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The researcher also found students assume that a good teacher must also be able to act as the parents for their students to meet the needs of students themselves, because this greatly affects the improvement of student learning themselves.

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*“A good teacher can be the second parents. If we have a problem or whatever, we have to trust the teacher, whatever the teacher says is for our good.”*

(The result of interviewed/T, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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Additionally, students view that a good teacher is an easy-going teacher.

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*“Hm, the first.. good teachers are easy-going teachers, easy to interact with their students like that.”*

(The result of interviewed/ N, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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In this finding, the participants revealed that they needed empathy from their teacher, a better relationship with their teacher.

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*“In my opinion, good teachers are the teachers who have high concern. Well...for example there are students who do not understand the material, and the teachers explained in more details to their students so that it is easier to understand.”*

(The result of interviewed/ T, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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### ***Motivating, performing comprehensible teaching, enthusiastic***

The current research findings found several statements from the participants that students require motivation from their teacher in learning activities, since this greatly helps their understanding.

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*“What good teachers usually say is...hmm...that’s more motivating. All teachers always motivate, but what is that...hmm. Good teachers have different ways to motivate their students.”*

(The result of interviewed/ M, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“What good teachers often say is more than that, motivating their students. For example, there are students who are diligent and some are not, but all students are treated equally by their teachers, given support or motivation so that their students are eager to learn more.”*

(The result of interviewed/ N, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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An excerpt reveals that comprehensible teaching is the situation where students can truly understand the material delivered by their teacher and in terms of sending material, the teacher must explain it briefly, but clearly; not too long and not too far everywhere. So, students do not feel bored when learning activities take place.

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*“The delivery of the material must be brief, but it is certainly also solid. So it’s not too long and not too far everywhere when explaining the material.”*

(The result of interviewed/ Dn, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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A participant stated that good teachers are enthusiastic teachers

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*“If the teacher is enthusiastic and also focused on students, then the students’ needs will be met, students will be eager to learn.”*

(The result of interviewed/ N, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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### ***Humorous, assertive, humble, and patient***

The participants revealed that humor is needed in learning activities. This can help students not feel bored and sleepy when they study the in class.

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*“I think humor is very important. So, it must be put into the materials..... for example, there are students who are sleepy so they wake up again because many people laugh because of the humor that is deliberately given by the teacher.”*

(The result of interviewed/ N, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“I have experience with good teacher, even bad teacher. I think a good teacher is a friendly teacher, like to joke... Be open with their students.”*

(The result of interviewed/ Dc, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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The participants also stated that beside have sense of humour, good teachers also must have assertiveness.

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*“For example, although the teacher likes to tuck humor while teaching, the teacher is still assertive in giving assignments and can make students feel comfortable.”*

(The result of interviewed/ Dc, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“Important.....In my opinion it’s important because sometimes I’m also sleepy. hahaha, on average many students are sleepy. So, if interspersed with humor, students will not be sleepy, huh...be a teacher close to students. But the humour must be limited.”*

(The result of interviewed/ Dn, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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The students assumed that good teachers must also be humble with their students.

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*“...Because the teacher is humble, so we are welcome too. So, what is it like hheu... for us, it is also comfortable, so when I study, there are no obstacles, and the pressure to understand the material conveyed.”*

(The result of interviewed/ M, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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Based on student's narration, being a teacher must have extra patience to educate students.

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*“ Good teachers are different. So, more patient in dealing with all of us.”*

(The result of interviewed/ M, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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## **What Makes Teachers Bad?**

### ***Being injustice, antipathy, irresponsible***

The researcher found the participants complained that they often find teachers who only give a privilege to one student who is superior to another, and always compare students who excel with other students. They are not treated equally by their teacher. As a result, students feel there is injustice when they study with that teacher.

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*“Bad teachers are the teachers who impose one’s abilities; treating students unequally. They also frequently compare between superior students with inferior ones.”*

(The result of interviewed/ T, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“.....For example, every time, when bad teachers teaching in the class, they always focus on only one student who is superior. So, the other students have not been able to understand the material conveyed by the teachers.”*

(The result of interviewed/ Dc, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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The researcher found the participant stated that he has antipathies teacher. Consequently, when they no longer liked a particular teacher, they would automatically also not like the subject held by the teacher.

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*“...For example, when a student doesn’t like with her/ his teacher, automatically he/she doesn’t like to the lesson of the teacher...”*

(The result of interviewed/ N, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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### ***Being authoritarian, and short-tempered.***

From the results of the interviews conducted, there were the students who complained that they had found the teachers who lacked a sense of responsibility and their teachers do not care about them.

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*“Then for example, if the teacher is not too close to students, it could be that every time the teacher comes, they will say “this teacher is boring”. There are some students who become lazy so they leave the class...”*

(There sult of interviewed/ Dn, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“Talking about bad teachers, they don’t want to know the student’s business, no matter what happens to their students.They don’t care.”*

(The result of interviewed/ T, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“...Bad teachers are those who come to give their students assignments, keep going out. There is no sense of responsibility.”*

(The result of interviewed/ Dn, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“First, bad teachers have a cold attitude, like those who don't care about their students. For example, just give a task, then just continue or give a task just explained so there is no description of the task like that, like to share how to do it like that.”*

(The result of interviewed/ N, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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Some of the students interviewed have had the experience of getting an authoritarian teacher, in the sense of often imposing their will on their students to achieve the targets they expect, regardless of the needs of the students themselves.

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*“...bad teachers in my opinion are the teachers who are too hard in terms of educating us all. For example, this is a full-day school. The full-day school students should not be given assignments at home. Nah, they already knew that the students can’t be given assignments at home, but they still give assignments, and the deadlines are very tight.”*

(The result of interviewed/ M, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“The authoritarian teacher is not good in terms of education like I was demanded to be like this, while my ability is still below. I have not been able to achieve what s/he wants. S/he demanded that today I should get a grade of 9, so it doesn’t feel good to me either. Feeling depressed.”*

(The result of interviewed/ M, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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Moreover, the students define bad teachers are the ones who have short-tempered, they are easily angry and mad.

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*“Bad teachers always bitchy or what....when they come to the class and if the students do not understand they will be angry. The language is not good. I heard that there are also teachers who like to play rough with their students out there. But, in this high school, there is none like that.”*

(The result of interviewed/ Dn, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

*“Bad teachers always force, scold or continue to instruct even though the student does not understand about the subjects that have been conveyed in these subjects.”*

(The result of interviewed/ T, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

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## **DISCUSSION**

### ***The Quality of the Teacher-Student Relationship***

Individual considerations are related to how teachers cope with the problems encountered by students while studying at school. According to the students’ narration, a good teacher always responds to the progress of class learning as a whole. Students expect their teachers to review the material until they fully understand, especially for those who have lack capability in grasping the information. Besides, the students also revealed that the teachers can become more concerned with them not only on the material presented, but also their psychological condition. The current findings are in line with previous research claiming that students expect good teachers to respond the abilities and meet the individual needs of their students by helping them understand difficult material after lessons. Then, most of students need to feel that the teachers are not only concerned with learning material, but also with their personal problems and needs of them (Raufelder *et al.*, 2016). In addition, the participants also revealed that good teachers also had to be able to play their role as friends. Based on student’s narratives, it is explained that if the teachers are friendly to their students, they automatically will also be more friendly and welcome to their teachers. This is in line with the findings of Raufelder *et al.*, (2016) mentioning that “students want a healthy relationship with their tutors and want to get along with them

“like friends” even outside the classroom (p. 34)”. By doing so, it will be easier for teachers to recognize the student’s learning needs, because they are close to their students.

Furthermore, this present study also informed that a good teacher must also be able to act as the students’ parents, because this greatly impacts on the improvement of the students’ learning achievement. Based on their narration, a good teacher is an easy-going person. The point is that the teacher is relaxed and s/he does not like to magnify the problem, and is able to place themselves in the environment they occupy or more precisely sociable. Easy-going teachers will be more welcomed or respected by their students, because of their understanding, acceptance, and willingness to communicate with their students. This is in line with previous research from Dongshan (2017) arguing that teachers with an easy-going, funny and strong personality, and a sense of responsibility will be more popular, and respected among students. Therewithal is empathy. Cohen and Wheelwright (2004) in Stojiljković, Djigic, & Zlatcović (2012) define empathy as an attitude of natural self-adjustment with others, spontaneous thoughts and feelings, whatever they are. In this finding, the participants revealed that they needed empathy from their teacher, a better relationship with their teacher. With this regard, Raufelder *et al.*, (2016) also elucidate that “teachers can be categorized as good if students feel that the relationship is characterized by the same feelings of empathy and affection (p. 34). Besides, if the teachers have more empathy and good relationship with their students, it can impact on the improvement of the students’ academic competence. These current findings are in line with previous research that if teachers have an empathy and supportive interpersonal relationship in school with their students, it will greatly influence students’ attitudes and academic values (Klem and Connell’s, 2004; Strikwerda-Brown, *et al.*, 2008).

In contrast, the main themes that address bad teacher perceptions are less diverse. The quality of teacher-student relationship is further divided into two sub-themes: (a) injustice, (b) antipathy. First is injustice. Students complained that they often find teachers who only privilege one student who is superior to another, and always compare students who excel with other students. They are not treated equally by their teacher. As a result, students feel there is injustice when they study with the teacher. This is very inconsiderable since it can cause a decrease in achievement or suppress the development of student learning in school. Accordingly, Raufelder *et al.*, (2016) maintain, when students perceive teacher’s behavior as unfair, and feel the relationship with the teachers is not good, they will categorize them as bad teachers. The second sub-theme is antipathy. Abecassis (2003) in Hafen, Nurmi, Laursen, & Salmera-Aro (2013), considered antipathy as an attitude that refers to dislike, or active avoidance of others. Interestingly, some of the participants interviewed in this study did not mention specific reasons directly related to the dislike of bad teachers. They only concluded that if they no longer liked a particular teacher, they would automatically also not like the subject held by the teacher.

### ***Teaching Expertise***

Motivation is an impulse that comes from oneself or others to do something (Wambugu, Peter & Muola, 2018). Motivation is something that is very important for anyone, especially for students who are undergoing the education. Motivation is a must present attitude for them because this can affect the mindset, the development of the students’ learning, and students’ achievement (Ma’arif, Abdullah, Fatimah, & Hidayati, 2021). Beside motivation from parents, motivation from teachers is also very important to note for the sake of the students’ progress and improvement while studying. In a study conducted by Raufelder *et al.*, (2016), it is explained that “students described the teacher’s

own motivation as a key element of teaching skills. In detail, students underline that their teacher's enthusiasm can positively influence their own motivation in class (p. 40).” Likewise, the current research findings found several statements from the participants that students can require motivation from their teacher in learning activities, because this greatly influences their understanding. The current findings are related to the previous research conducted by Gordon (2012) in Lupascu (2014) stating that good teachers are effective teachers. Effective teachers here mean that the teachers are able to motivate their students in learning, overcome excessive and permissive authoritarian traps.

The second issue appeared was in relation to the comprehensible teaching. According to the students' narration, comprehensible teaching is the situation where students can truly understand the materials delivered by their teacher. In terms of sending material, the teachers are expected to explain briefly, yet clearly; not too long and not too far everywhere. Therefore, students would not feel bored when learning activities take place. The next is enthusiastic. Enthusiastic can be described as a sense of spirit and love for the subject held, and shows a strong commitment to work (Keller, Fischer, & Neumann, 2013; Rosmala, Hidayati, & Abdullah, 2021). In the current finding, students also revealed that good teachers must be enthusiastic when they teach in the classroom, designing teaching activities, organizing classroom teaching, loving and really understanding the subject they hold, and they must focus on the needs of their students. Additionally, enthusiastic attitude is also a major determinant of the effectiveness of a teaching. This is related to what was stated by Brophy & Good (1986) in Keller, Fischer, & Neumann (2013), “enthusiastic [is] registered as the main determinant about teaching effectiveness (p.247)”. Even, teachers should be able to raise students' critical language awareness, shape a strong ethnical identity, support the language use contextually and enhance self-beliefs while performing classroom interaction (Hidayati, Mohnawawi, Ramdhani, 2019).

In contrast, the lack of teaching expertise consists of: (a) irresponsibility and, (b) authoritarianism. Irresponsibility is a dangerous act that a teacher could do. There were students who complained that they had found some teachers who have lack of sense of responsibility and their teachers do not care about them. For example, the teacher comes to the class only to give an assignment, after that, they leave without giving any explanation on how the complete rules are supposed to be. Automatically, the students often experience confusion because they do not get clear direction and explanation after they do the assignments given by their teachers. As a result, the students often feel upset and do not like the subject of their teachers. It has a very negative effect on the students. One of effects is that the students do not understand the material that should be understood. In fact, they often skip the class on every subject that teacher has. These current findings are in line with the previous research of Dalton (2013) claiming that bad teachers always follow the standard curriculum, which they can ignore the curriculum altogether except for personal gain, and always avoid personal contact with students. Furthermore, this finding is also related to the previous research of Kavenuke (2013) mentioning that bad teachers are also described as highly knowledgeable and skilled teachers but they often leave their students in the classroom. The point is that they do not have a sense of responsibility towards their students in terms of delivering the material properly. The second is authoritarianism. The authoritarianism practiced by teachers when teaching students is a big mistake for a teacher. Some of the students interviewed have had the experience of getting an authoritarian teacher, in the sense of often imposing their will on their students to achieve the targets they expect, regardless of the needs of the students themselves. This makes students feel uncomfortable and depressed. Therefore, they categorize this type of

teacher as a bad teacher. This is in line with the previous research of Dalton (2013) maintaining that the teachers are presented badly because they are disliked by their students or disliked, are boring, often frightening, or want to dominate their students to match what the teacher expects. As a result, they felt uncomfortable and depressed.

### ***Teacher's Personal Characteristics***

Four personal characteristics are other considerations to define an ideal teacher: (a) humorous, (b) assertive, (c) humble, (d) patient. According to the research from Powell and Andresen (2017), humor can be useful as a tool to get and maintain the attention and interest of students when learning. In addition, it can reduce tension and help students develop their creative thinking. This previous research in line with the current findings reporting that humor is needed in learning activities. This can help students reduce boredom and sleepy when they study in the class. Otherwise, students' foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) may emerge if teachers tend to show too strict personal characteristic during teaching practices (Jabar, Hidayati & Supriyono, 2018). With this in mind, there should also be limitation to this. In a sense, it can sneak humor when teaching, but do not overdo it. Rather, constancy is also needed. As Lange & Jakubowski (1976) in Milovanovic, Miladinovic and Stojanovic (2016) stated, assertiveness is an ability to state, claim or defend something, take responsibility, and the ability to control one's emotions, and the ability to make decisions by considering the rights of others, and it involves certain categories of social reactions. Actually, assertiveness needs to be owned by every teacher, because disciplined attitudes will foster the independence of students. Next, the students assumed that good teachers must also be humble with their students (Abdullah & Lulita, 2018). Based on student's narration, if the teachers are humble, the students will be more welcome to their teachers and feel comfortable; there is no fear or anything. Besides, humble teacher will be more dedicated and open to new experiences, adopting democracy in the classroom as well environment, and building social and excellent communication (Andriani & Abdullah, 2017; Sezgin & Erdoğan, 2018). Last but not least, being a teacher must have extra patience to educate students, because teachers who have high patience can help build good character to their students (Shah, 2009). Equally important, this also attempts to raise students' intercultural communicative competence (hereafter, ICC) as a bridge for them to communicate inter-culturally (Abdullah & Tandiana, 2019).

On a contrary, the students considered teachers having short-tempered emotion, easy to get angry as the bad ones. The findings indicate that in teaching activities, teachers need to hold their emotions. They never bring problems at home to school since it would bring negative effects on their students. Moreover, this also aims at providing the teaching convenience which becomes one main factor to gain the students' learning engagement (Hidayati, Ramalia, and Abdullah, 2021). By doing so, they would not feel afraid while studying, rather, they would feel secure.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The researchers are fully aware that in conducting this research, there are limitations when trying to analyse the data that has been obtained in this study. First, there are limitations to interpreting the data obtained, because the data listed as a result of each study must have relevant studies. The second is no gender-specific response patterns were examined. The conclusions of this qualitative study are; good teachers, according to Indonesian higher vocational school students, are the teachers who build a good relationship with their students, good ethics, have abilities in terms of affective and cognitive aspects, and are able to realize learning objectives by paying attention to the

needs of their students and vice versa. We advise future researchers to focus on different age, because it is possible that students' and teachers' age influences their perceptions, and more focus on teaching expertise/ teaching skills.

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