

**FOSTERING STUDENT LEARNING:  
EFL TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE AND SUBJECT  
CONTENT ON STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT**

**Bachtiar**

*greatiar@yahoo.co.nz*

Universitas Muhammadiyah Parepare (UMPAR)  
*Jl. Ahmad Yani, Km. 6 Kota Parepare, Sulawesi Selatan*

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**Corresponding Author:**

*greatiar@yahoo.co.nz*

**Abstract:** this study explored whether and how EFL teachers' pedagogical competence and subject content contribute to gain in students' English achievement. Using correlational study, the results indicated that students' attitude to teachers' pedagogical competence and English lesson content were positive. Interestingly, the students' attitude towards English teachers' pedagogical competence is higher than the students' attitude towards English lesson contents. This finding provides support for policy initiatives designed to improve students' English language achievement by increasing EFL teachers' knowledge and English lesson contents.

**Keywords – EFL Teachers, Teachers' Pedagogic  
Competence, Lesson Content, Students'  
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**INTRODUCTION**

For many years, educators and researchers have attracted to find out which school variables influence student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Some evidences indicate that "schools bring little influence to bear upon a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context" (Coleman et al., 1966: 325). Other researchers suggest that factors like class size (Mosteller, 1997), teachers' qualifications (Ferguson, 1991), and other school variables may play an important role in what students learn. Although some evidences suggest that better qualified teachers may make a difference for students' learning in the classroom, yet few empirical studies to date have assessed various components of teachers' knowledge directly and used them to predict instructional quality and students' outcomes (Fennema & Franke, 1992; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005). In addition, the impact of subject content on students' motivation in learning has not been explored sufficiently.

This paper reports positively and substantively important relationships between English teachers' pedagogic competence and lesson contents on students' English achievement. The core question guiding the study was whether English teacher's pedagogical competence and English lesson contents make a contribution to the quality of instruction and students' motivation that impact students' achievement.

### **Teachers' Pedagogic Competence**

One of the most important components in a learning situation is the teachers themselves. The teachers' knowledge, skill and personality are instrumental in creating the conditions for learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The important roles of teachers in many activities have been discussed by the educational experts for a long time. Oser (1992:23) indicates that:

*The personality of the teacher coupled with his attitude towards his pupil, his colleges, his supervisor, and his work will determine the extent to which any program, no matter how well formulated, will be carried out. Naturally the general teaching skill of instructor, his special training in the field of language teaching, and linguistic ability will also affect the teaching learning situation.*

In terms of teachers' pedagogic competence both content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge has also attracted increasing attention from researchers for decades. Shulman (1987:8), for example, has formulated a widely accepted of conceptualizing teachers' content-specific belief systems about students' learning and appropriate ways of teaching. He indicates that "the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction".

Over the years, educational researchers have investigated many factors that are considered affect students' learning. At the heart of this line of inquiry is the core belief that teachers make differences. It may be that the positive effects of subject matter knowledge are augmented or offset by teachers' knowledge of how to teach the subject to various kinds of students. That is, the degree of pedagogical skills may interact with subject matter knowledge to bolster or reduce teacher performance. As Byrne (1983:14) suggested:

*It is surely plausible to suggest that insofar as a teacher's knowledge provides the basis for his or her effectiveness, the most relevant knowledge will be that which concerns the particular topic being taught and the relevant pedagogical strategies for teaching it to the particular types of pupils to whom it will be taught..... Similarly, knowledge of teaching strategies relevant to teaching fractions will be important.*

The most promising work in measuring teachers' knowledge has been carried out in the field of mathematics by a research group led by Deborah Ball and Heather Hill, who created a sophisticated tool for measuring subject matter knowledge for elementary level mathematics and then used this instrument in a larger study (Ball & Bass, 2002). They reported on the specific "mathematical knowledge used in teaching" (Hill, Ball, Blunk, Goffney, & Rowan, 2007:377), using a common standardized test to gauge student gains in mathematics. They found that teachers with more of this type of knowledge had significantly larger student gains in their classrooms.

By recognizing the important role of teachers, we accept that teachers also have dominant factors to the success of the students in learning. The roles of teachers are needed to create a good condition in a classroom. Katz and McClellan (1997) proposed that teachers possess three roles: teachers as teachers, teachers as the participants and teachers as facilitators. These indicate that the students' positive attitude toward a subject will grow and improve based on how teachers carry out their role and profession.

### **Students' Attitude toward EFL Teachers' Pedagogic Competence and English Lesson Contents**

The way EFL teachers teach in classrooms brings together their experience, ability and feeling as well as their attitude toward teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The same case with classroom management that EFL teachers apply depends wholly on the teachers' way of responding to the classroom situation. If there is a common cultural heritage, there is a possibility to be a closer understanding and sympathy between the students and the teacher (Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1991). That's why, EFL teachers are better to understand not only students' linguistic problems, but also their predicament.

Teachers' knowledge of native language and culture has provided them with valuable insights into social and political areas of sensitivity as well as that of the English language and culture (Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1991). These facts can be used to direct students' attitude toward the teacher and finally will help the learners to gain success in English language learning. It is believed that the attitude of the teacher may support learners' attitude toward learning English and vice versa.

A number of recent studies have pointed up the importance of teachers' attitude to the learners. Teacher expectations have been shown to make a great deal of difference to student success (Jussim, Madon, & Chatman, 1994). With perfect ability in classroom

management, teachers may improve learners' attitude to learn by providing some tools to meet learners' needs in learning English.

Students' attitude toward EFL teachers may determine how far the learners achieve in learning English. EFL teachers should be creative enough in engaging student's attentions toward learners' learning styles, learners' cultural background, etc. EFL teachers' knowledge, skills and understanding have great possibility to influence students' willingness and motivation in learning English. Along the same line, students' excitement may improve their attitude toward learning English which will lead to a successful in learning English (Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1991).

Another aspect that also impacts students' achievement is students' attitude toward teaching materials (Çepni, Taş, & Köse, 2006). Students' attitude toward teaching materials (lesson contents) obviously directs how far they accept the materials that are being taught. Teaching materials should be prepared perfectly to meet the students' perspective as well as the teaching syllabus in order to success in language learning and teaching. There are certain general principles, based on good language teaching practice, which will help teachers in evaluating their course-books or their teaching materials. Faucette (2001) suggests some principles for materials evaluation: relate the teaching materials and objectives, be aware of what language will help equip your students to use language effectively for their own purposes, keep your students learning needs in mind, and consider the relationship between language, the learning process and the learner.

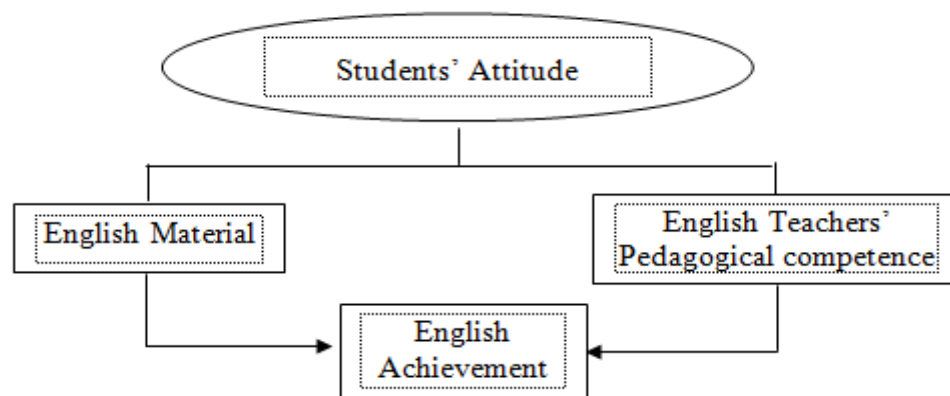
The four principles for materials evaluation by Faucette above can be used in determining good language teaching materials by selecting and evaluating them carefully in order to gain students' positive attitude toward teaching materials. In teaching English, EFL teachers need to find ways to increase students' attitude towards English materials as that may affect student's emotions and feeling toward English and gain the high achievement in learning (Gerry & Wingard, 1981).

### **Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

There had been a growing concept of the attitude of students toward English materials and English teacher's pedagogical competence. The relationship between the attitude of students toward English lesson content and English teachers' pedagogical competence has a significant correlation with their achievements. Students can be identified with their positive attitude which affects their attainment in English language learning.

The identification of research problem may form a model of the research design in which the definition of variables may create some hypotheses in relation to the questions on the research design. The hypothesis can be answered through the methods or tools or models.

Conceptual framework (see Figure 1) describes the degree of correlation between the three variables of this research: English materials, English teachers' pedagogical competence, and students' English achievement.



**Figure 1.** Correlation between independent variables and dependent variable

Based on the conceptual framework, the hypotheses for this study were as follows:

$H_0$  : there is no significant correlation between students' attitude toward English materials and English teachers' pedagogical competence with their English achievement.

$H_1$  : there is significant correlation between students' attitude toward English materials and English teachers' pedagogical competence with their English achievement.

## METHOD

The method of this research was correlational research. Correlational research involves collecting data to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables. Correlational research typically investigates a number of variables believed to be related to a major, complex variable, such as achievement. This research used inferential statistics namely simple correlation test to find out correlation between students' attitude toward English materials and English teachers' pedagogical competence and their English achievement.

A purposive sampling procedure was used to determine the sample for this study. The researcher used purposive sampling technique to take three out of the six classes, namely class X, XI IA and XI IS. The number of the samples was 68 students. The chosen classes were based on the consideration that, the class XII joined at national examination,

so they could not take a part on this research. The efforts to represent the population were done to enable the researcher to generalize the results within the same context. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) samples should be as large as possible. In general, the larger the sample, the more representative it is likely to be, and the more generalizable the results of the study are likely to be.

A set of questionnaire and English tests were constructed and administered to 68 students. The questionnaire was constructed based on the items coming from checklist and upon the data needed that was primary data. It was distributed to the students to obtain information concerning students' attitude toward English materials consist of 26 items, and students' attitude toward English teachers' pedagogical competence consist of 26 items. The questionnaire was translated into Bahasa Indonesia to help the students understand more fully and facilitate obtaining more accurate information. In addition, the English tests were distributed out at the same level. The English test was based on national examination covers listening (consisted on 11 questions), and reading (29 questions), and school examination covers speaking (3 dialogues) and writing (2 questions).

Data on students' attitude was analysed and given score using five-point Likert scale (*ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree*). While the English tests consist of four parts: listening section (consisted of 11 questions with maximum score is 11 points), reading comprehension (consisted of 29 questions with maximum score is 29 points), writing, and speaking test presented 3 dialogues by using the scoring criteria. The gain scores in English tests were converted to a set of score of maximum of 100, using the following simple formula:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\text{The students' correct answer}}{\text{Total number of items}} \times 100$$

**Table 1. The Students' Scores Classification**

91 to 100	is classified as very good
76 to 90	is classified as good
61 to 75	is classified as fair
51 to 60	is classified as poor
< 50	is classified as very poor

(Depdiknas, 2008:1)

Scores for both students' attitude questionnaires and English test was then correlated. The correlation was analysed using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient:

$$r_{ry} = \frac{n \sum X_i X_j - (\sum X_i) (\sum X_j)^2}{\sqrt{\{n \sum X_i^2 - (\sum X_i)^2\} \{n \sum Y_j^2 - (\sum Y_j)^2\}}}$$

To interpret the result of the correlation analysis of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient described as the following table:

**Table 2. Person Standard Correlation**

No	Standard	Interpretation
1	0.000 – 0.200	Very low
2	0.200 – 0.400	Low
3	0.400 – 0.600	Moderate
4	0.600 – 0.800	Substantial
5	0.800 – 1.000	High

(Gay et al., 2006)

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Findings

The findings of the research deal with the attitude of the students toward English materials and English teachers' pedagogical competence and their English achievements. The results were analysed using SPSS 16 for Windows (SPSS inc. 2007) in terms of test criteria analysis, descriptive statistics and test of hypothesis.

### *Students' Attitude towards English Materials*

The results show that the students' attitude towards English materials is positive category, which is shown by 34 (62.96%) students who had ranged scores from 89 to 109. The data of students' attitude towards English materials described in the following table:

**Table 3. The Interval Score on Students' Attitude towards English Materials**

Category	Interval Score	Frequency	Percentage
Very Positive	110 – 130	5	7.35
Positive	89 – 109	46	67.65
Neutral	68 – 88	16	23.53
Negative	47 – 67	1	1.47
Very Negative	26 – 46	0	0.00

The majority of the students (67.65%) had a positive attitude to English materials, followed by sixteen of them stated neutral. In addition, there were five of the students had

very positive attitude to the English materials, and only one who had a negative attitude to the English materials. The mean score obtained by the students is 92.59 and standard deviation is 12.33. This indicates that the students' attitude towards English materials is categorised into 'positive', and represented by following histogram.

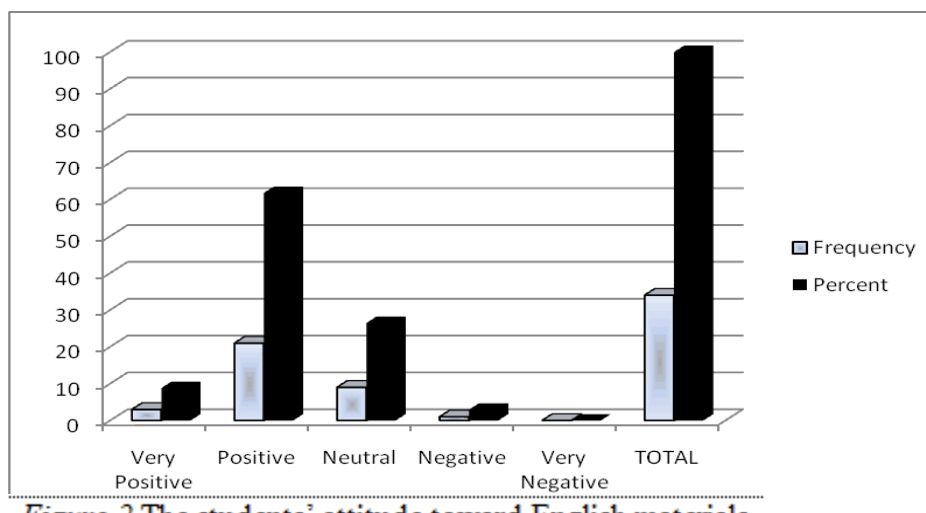


Figure 2 The students' attitude toward English materials

#### *Students' Attitude towards English Teachers' Pedagogical Competence*

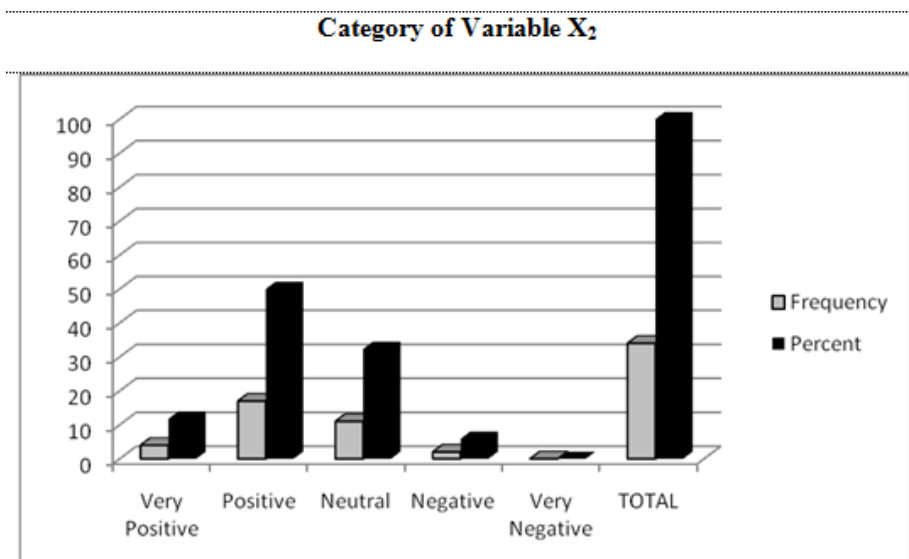
The results show that the students' attitude towards English teachers' pedagogical competence is positive category, which is proved by 41 (60.29%) students who had ranged scores from 89 to 109. The data of the students' attitude towards English teachers' pedagogical competence are described in the following table.

Table 4. The Interval Score on Students' Attitude towards English Teachers' Pedagogical Competence

Category	Interval Score	Frequency	Percentage
Very Positive	110 – 130	7	10.29
Positive	89 – 109	41	60.29
Neutral	68 – 88	19	27.94
Negative	47 – 67	1	1.47
Very Negative	26 – 46	0	0.00

Most of the students (60.29%) had a positive attitude to the English teachers' pedagogical competence, followed by nineteen of them stated neutral. In addition, there were seven of the students who had a very positive attitude to the English teachers' competence, and only one who had a negative attitude to the English teachers' competence. The mean score obtained by the students is 91.85 and standard deviation is 13.12. Therefore, the students' attitude towards English teachers' pedagogical competence is categorised into 'positive', and represented by the following histogram.





**Figure 3** The students' attitude toward English teachers' pedagogical competence

### ***The Correlation of the Students' Attitude toward English Materials and Their English Achievement***

The results of the correlation analysis of the students' attitude toward English materials and the students' English achievement show that scores of English tests as many as 0.54. Based on the interpretation of Pearson standard correlation, the students' scores are in moderate interpretation, where moderate interpretation of the table is ranging from 0.400 – 0.600. Therefore, the research hypothesis (H1) is accepted. This indicates that there is a significant and positive correlation between students' attitude toward English materials and English achievement.

**Table 5. The Correlation between Students' Attitude toward English Materials and Their English Achievement**

<b>Correlations</b>			
		Attitude to Materials (X1)	English Test (Y)
Attitude to Materials (X1)	Pearson Correlation	1	.540**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	34	34
English Test (Y)	Pearson Correlation	.540**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	34	34

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### ***The Correlation of the Students' Attitude toward English Teachers' Pedagogical Competence and Their English Achievement***

The results of correlation analysis of the students' attitude toward English teachers' pedagogical competence and the students' English achievement show that scores of English test as many as 0.62. Therefore, it can be interpreted through a Pearson standard correlation table that students score is in substantial interpretation, where substantial interpretation of the table is ranging from 0.600 – 0.800. It can be concluded that the research hypothesis (H1) are accepted. This indicates that there is significant and positive correlation between the students' attitude toward English Teachers' Pedagogical Competence and their English achievement.

**Table 6. Correlation between Students' Attitude toward English Teachers' pedagogical Competence and Their English Achievement**

		<b>Correlations</b>	
		Attitude to Teachers (X2)	English Test (Y)
Attitude to Teachers (X2)	Pearson Correlation	1	.616**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	34	34
English Test (Y)	Pearson Correlation	.616**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	34	34

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### **Discussions**

The results of this study provide insight into factors impacting student achievement. The findings are consistent with the results of other studies of the relationship between teachers' competence and subject matter on student motivation and achievement (Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1991; Çepni et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hill et al., 2005). The discussion deals with arguments and further interpretation of the research findings through questionnaire and English test.

The findings of the study revealed that the students' attitude toward English materials is categorized into positive, which is shown by 67.65% of the students have scores between 89 and 109. The positive attitude from the students perhaps caused by the English materials given in teaching learning processes is mostly based on curriculum and real life context. Another aspect can be the students' willingness to get high or good grade from their English teacher as English language becomes compulsory subject in formal education and very important in students' academic achievement. This finding reflects the

need of successful language learning in the classroom (Chamot, 2005; Young, 1991).

Young (1991) indicates that the learners bring with them their whole experience of learning and of life in classrooms, along with their own reasons for being there, and their own practical needs that they hope to see satisfied.

The students' attitude toward English teachers' pedagogical competence is also categorized into positive category (60.29% of the students have score between 89 and 109). From the findings of the questionnaire item 5 (I am not interested with a teacher who do not mastery English subject well) and item 23 (I am very interested if English teacher uses English and Bahasa Indonesia in giving apperception, conducting subject and controlling class), the majority of the students strongly agreed and agreed to the English teachers' way in giving English subject. The positive attitude of the students has great possibility was impacted by the way the teachers conveyed the English materials, and as Young (1991) and Chamot (2005) indicate that teachers need to use various ways such as collaborative learning and contextual teaching and learning processes to encourage students follow the lesson and increase their motivation.

The result also indicates that the way teachers of English conduct and present lesson content is closed related to the students' attitude or respond toward English teacher. This is in line with what Brophy and Good (1984) and McGarity and Butts (1984) state that teachers' management in the classroom brings together the experience, ability and feeling as well as the attitude toward teaching English as a foreign language. Lamb and Coleman (2008) also found that students view their teachers of English as a factor influencing their like or dislike of English.

The result of the correlation analysis of the students' attitude toward English materials and the students' English achievement in Pearson standard correlation interpreted as positive and significant correlation. All of these facts above bring about some consideration in language teaching materials which will lead to the effectiveness and purposefulness of the English teaching as foreign language. The teaching materials reflect the need of successful language learning in the classroom (Allwright & Bailey, 1991) because the students bring their whole learning experience and life in classroom along with their own reason for being there, and their own practical needs that they hope to be satisfied.

The case that the students' attitude towards English teachers' pedagogical competence is higher than the students' attitude towards English materials, perhaps influenced by the fact that English teachers are put as a centre of teaching. The English teachers not only teach the material but also act as a motivator and create a warm situation

in the classroom. This is also in line with what Gardner and Tremblay (1994) found that in most cases, a positive attitude will strengthen motivation, whereas a negative attitude will negatively affect motivation in Second Language Learning. In addition, the fact that the students' attitude towards English teachers' pedagogical competence is higher than the students' attitude towards English materials is suspected that it was caused by teachers' ability to deliver subject content follow students' interest to English materials.

The findings from this study is important because it may recommend to educationalists, both policy and administrative level to take into account in which aspect need to be considered when they intend to provide professional activities for EFL teachers in order to optimize EFL teachers' teaching performance and improve student learning outcome. Teachers' ability to use appropriate teaching strategy, to manage classrooms and to engage student, as well as to choose appropriate teaching materials based on their students condition is believed have direct relation to students' achievement.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION**

The students in this study found that teachers' pedagogical competence significantly impact students' willingness to study English. In addition, the selection of appropriate English lesson content was also found to have relation to students' motivation in following English lesson. There is positive and significant correlation between students' attitude towards English materials and English teachers' pedagogical competence and their English achievement. Based on the percentage score of the correlation, the students' attitude toward English teachers' pedagogical competence (0.62) is higher than the students' attitude toward English materials (0.54).

The fact that teachers' pedagogical competence and English subject content impacted students' achievement, EFL teachers should build students' positive attitude toward English materials and English teachers' pedagogical competence. This is important because the attitude itself is directly related to motivation which has a direct effect on second language learning. Besides, the ultimate success in learning second language would most likely be seemed to depend on the attitude of learners. Similarly, teacher of English should be selective in choosing English materials and using various techniques and strategies in teaching English.

In the analyses reported here, the researcher only involved students from one senior high school. Replication of the quantitative survey with a larger population of students from other schools, including from other districts might allow wider comparisons. Next, this study only used survey as a main method for data collection. Therefore, it may fail to

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grasp deep understand from students about their perceptions of aspects that impact their learning outcomes. There is a need for further research that employ mixed method for data collection in order to get larger population, as well as a deep understanding from students.

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