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AN EXPLORATION OF EFL TEACHING PRACTICES IN LIGHT OF TEACHERS' LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

ANÁLISIS DE LAS PRÁCTICAS PEDAGÓGICAS DE DOCENTES DE INGLÉS BASADO EN SU NIVEL DE SUFICIENCIA

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Abstract

The influence of target language proficiency on language teaching practices is not a new area of research; nevertheless, there is still lack of knowledge since some research results have yield weak and inconclusive findings in different contexts. This research examines the relationship between EFL teachers' language proficiency and their

teaching practices. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was followed and two data collection instruments were used: an English proficiency test, to determine the EFL teachers' proficiency level and a class observation scheme, to record instructional practices of seventeen EFL teachers systematically. The percentage of time spent on the different categories of the first part of the scheme and proportions of each category of the second part of the scheme were calculated to perform a Spearman correlation test. After that, a qualitative analysis of the teaching practices was conducted in order to get a deeper understanding of the quantitative data. The results indicate that higher proficient teachers provide better quality of input and feedback and are better models for learners; however, a direct influence on classroom management was not found. An equal focus on pedagogy and methodology instruction as well as on target language improvement is suggested for EFL teacher education programs.

Keywords: classroom practices, teachers' language proficiency, EFL teaching, EFL teachers.

Resumen

La influencia del dominio del inglés en las prácticas de enseñanza de este idioma no es una nueva área de investigación; sin embargo, todavía hay desconocimiento ya que algunas investigaciones han arrojado resultados inconclusos en diferentes contextos. Esta investigación examina la relación entre el dominio lingüístico de los profesores de inglés y sus prácticas docentes. Se siguió un diseño explicativo secuencial de métodos mixtos y se utilizaron dos instrumentos de recopilación de datos: una prueba de dominio del inglés, para determinar el nivel de competencia de los docentes y un esquema de observación de clases, para registrar sistemáticamente las

prácticas de instrucción de diecisiete docentes. El porcentaje de tiempo dedicado a las diferentes categorías de la primera parte del esquema y las proporciones de cada categoría de la segunda parte del esquema se calcularon para realizar una prueba de correlación de Spearman. A continuación, se llevó a cabo un análisis cualitativo de las prácticas de enseñanza con el fin de obtener una comprensión más profunda de los datos cuantitativos. Los resultados indican que los docentes con mejor nivel proporcionan una mejor calidad de información y retroalimentación y son mejores modelos para los estudiantes; sin embargo, no se evidencia una influencia directa entre el nivel de inglés y el manejo del aula. Se sugiere que los programas de formación de docentes en inglés se enfoquen tanto en pedagogía y metodología cuanto en la mejora continua del idioma.

Palabras clave: prácticas en el aula, competencia lingüística de docentes, enseñanza de ILE, profesores de ILE.

1. Introduction

Language proficiency has been considered an essential component of professional foreign language teaching competence (Lafayette, 1993) and a paramount skill that must be in constant improvement for non-native teachers of a language (Medgyes, 2001). In fact, teachers' language proficiency might determine how well they can apply teaching methods and be an appropriate and reliable target language model to their students (Farrell and Richards, 2007). For instance, teachers with low proficiency speaking skills are more likely to struggle when giving instructions, asking questions, providing explanations, or replying to students (Cullen, 2002); in other words, the engagement in free-production and improvisational teaching would be a real challenge if teachers have limited speaking ability

(Richards, 2017). In the same vein, language proficiency can exert an influence on the ability to teach the target language through the target language and to scaffold students' learning (Richards, 2017).

Likewise, teachers' language proficiency constitutes a solid foundation of their professional confidence and identity (Butler, 2004; Cullen, 2002; Murdoch, 1994; Nhung, 2017); thus, language teachers with low language skills tend to lack self-confidence and grapple with the establishment of authority in their classrooms, which affects their overall classroom performance (Cullen, 2002). As a matter of fact, Pennington and Richards (2016) have pointed out that when English language teachers grow more confident and comfortable in using the target language to teach, they tend to establish the identity of an insider language teacher. Besides, teachers' self-efficacy (which refers to teachers' perceived abilities to carry out teaching activities and tasks) has been positively correlated with their self-evaluated language proficiency (Chacón, 2005; Eslami & Fatami, 2008; Faez & Karas, 2017).

Additionally, teachers' language proficiency might influence students' motivation and learning effectiveness (Butler, 2004). In the words of Chambles (2012), students' learning is directly infuenced by the teachers' proficiency level since the latter determines the teaching approach as well as the amount of foreign language spoken in class, whose quantity and quality are fundamental for second language learning.

Another reason for acknowledging the importance of teachers' language proficiency is that the communicative approach to language teaching, which is nowadays the approach endorsed by many textbooks and courses and thus, a "general accepted norm" in

the second language teaching field (Brown, 2011, p. 42), demands high levels of teachers' language proficiency if it is to be implemented effectively (Farrell and Richards, 2007). Therefore, communicative language teaching is a challenge for non-native speaking teachers who are not fluent enough in the language they teach (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Notwithstanding the undeniable influence of language proficiency on language teaching ability, language proficiency should not be deemed as the one and only neccesary requirement for effective teaching since other abilities suchs as pedagogical skills and effective communication play a significant role as well (Coelho, 2004). As a matter of fact, Richards (2011) reported observing some of the best English classes taught by non-native speaker teachers while some of the worst lessons he observed were instructed by native-speaker teachers. Additionally, some researchers have emphasized that native-like language ability is not necessary for effective English teaching (Richards, 2017; Canagarajah, 1999), and according to Tsang (2017), there's a paucity of rigorous studies proving that higher teachers' language proficiency is tantamount to better teaching. In similar fashion, Freeman (2017), although acknowledging the importance of teachers' English command, argued against "the syllogism that the more fluent in English, the more effective the teaching," and has claimed that what should be more emphasized in teacher education is "English-for-teaching" (based on the English for Specific Purposes methodology) rather than general English proficiency (p. 32). This suggested new approach would tackle the type of language required to be used in the classroom for teaching effectively, which focuses mainly on the use of language for managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson

content, and assessing and giving students feedback. Moreover, in a meta-analysis carried out by Faez et al. (2019), a moderate correlation between language proficiency and self-efficacy was found, language proficiency contributing to the variance in self-efficacy only in a small percentage, which made the authors conclude that language proficiency is not the only factor that determines self-efficacy. However, according to Canh and Renandya (2017), in order to create learning opportunities for learners and to teach effectively, EFL teachers need both an advanced level of general English language proficiency and classroom English language proficiency.

In spite of the foregoing assertions, it can be said that, generally speaking, native-speakerism has been avowed as the most important requisite for effective language teaching and thus, employing practices have been usually based on general language proficiency alone; consequently, there has been a preference for native speaker teachers over their non-native speaker counterparts, the latter often being undervalued and discriminated (Reis, 2011; Freeman, 2016).

On the other hand, preoccupation pertaining low levels of language teachers' proficiency has aroused in the field of language teacher education (Richards et al., 2013), especially for English teaching, since due to the high demand for English teachers around the world, people who do not meet the necessary qualifications are being hired (Bailey, 2006; Andrews, 2003). This situation is also true in Ecuador; for instance, in 2018, there were 9.737 EFL teachers (although around 13.000 teachers were needed to satisfy the demand) in public schools from whom only 34% of them had a B2 proficiency level ("Solo," 2018), which is the requirement established by the Ministry of Education to be able to teach in public schools. In addition,

a study carried out by Abad et al. (2019) found out that some student teachers in high semesters of the TEFL degree program at a university in Cuenca had a very low language proficiency level and thus, by the end of the program, they were very unlikely to reach the required B2 level.

Unfortunately, an agreement has not been reached on the level of proficiency required for effective teaching (Faez & Karas, 2017) since the constructs of proficiency, proficiency requirements, proficiency levels, and proficiency types vary according to different contexts (Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2012; Faez et al. 2019). In addition, even though a general proficiency threshold is said to be necessary for effective teaching (Richards, 2010), this threshold has been hard to define and remained ambiguous due to the disparateness of teaching contexts, tasks, contents, and cultures (Elder & Kim, 2014). Besides, the importance of language proficiency is undermined after that threshold has been stepped across, and features such as pedagogical skills and personality override it (Tsang, 2017). Likewise, the term *effective teaching* lacks a straightforward definition since researchers do not agree on what effective teaching involves (Chambles, 2012); in fact, there is no consensus on whether to define teaching effectiveness in terms of "teacher inputs (e.g., qualifications), the teaching process (e.g., instructional practices), the product of teaching (e.g., effects on student learning), or a composite of these elements" (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011, p. 340). Accordingly, different studies have operationalized effective teaching in different ways such as the ability to use innovative techniques, teaching commitment, classroom management, and the ability to predict students' success (Ortaçtepe & Akyel, 2015); feedback, cooperative learning, and adaptive instruction (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997);

classroom management, understanding and communicating lesson content, and assessing students and giving feedback (Freeman et al. 2015), just to name a few; however, according to Richards (2010), effective teaching demands teachers to have the following language-specific competencies: the ability to comprehend texts accurately, to provide good language models, to maintain fluent use of the target language in the classroom, to give explanations and instructions in the target language, to provide examples of words and grammatical structures and give accurate explanations, to use appropriate classroom language, to select target-language resources, to monitor their own speech and writing for accuracy, to give correct feedback on learner language, to provide input at an appropriate level of difficulty, and to provide language-enrichment experiences for learners.

By the same token, researching about the relationship between language proficiency and language teaching is not simple and straightforward; consequently, there is lack of knowledge and research in this area, and some research results have yield weak and inconclusive findings in different contexts (Faez & Karas, 2017; Faez et al. 2019). Among the reasons for the mentioned difficulty is the fact that compared with other subject-matter teaching, language teaching is dissimilar since language is both the content and the medium of instruction; therefore, trying to establish a clear separation between teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills is complicated, and thus, some studies have included the construct of language proficiency as part of self-efficacy while other researchers have separated them, causing some validity issues (Faez & Karas, 2017). Besides, measuring teachers' language proficiency has been a predicament and a limitation since it's not always feasible to give

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teachers a standardized exam; hence, studies have usually included proficiency self-evaluations and perceptions instead (for example Richards et al., 2013 and Sadeghi et al., 2019), which have been critiziced for lacking objetivity (Denies & Janssen, 2016).

In this light, in order to add to this area of research, the impact that EFL teachers'competence has on their teaching, which according to Sadeghi et al. (2019) lacks systematic studies; in order to provide empirical evidence from the Latin American context, in which not enough studies have been carried out; and in order to attempt to overcome proficiency self-evaluation issues, this research addresses the following research question: How are EFL teaching practices influenced by the teachers' English proficiency?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and Context

This study was carried out in six private secondary schools in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador, during the months of September 2018 to March 2019. There are 177 private high schools in this city, which can vary according to the number of students, the number of EFL teachers, the tuition being paid, the number of hours of English instruction per week, the English level the students will reach upon graduation, the policies followed to hire EFL teachers, just to name a few (see Table 1). Participation invitations were sent to 15 secondary schools selected at random; however, only six accepted to be part of the study. It is important to mention that a textbook series was used as the main guide in all these six high schools. In order to guarantee anonymity, codes were assigned to high schools and participants.

Table 1: *Characteristics of the Participant Secondary Schools*

School code	# of students	# of EFL teachers	Tuition	English classes per week	Exit English level	Textbook used
HS1	637	3	139,76	6	B1+	Unlock, Cambridge University Press
HS2	800	6	153	8	B2	American Think, Cambridge University Press
HS3	1016	6	172,83	10	B2	Compact for schools, Cambridge University Press
HS4	300	3	331,17	8	B1+	Uncover, Cambridge University Press
HS5	256	3	335	10	B2+	Gateway, Macmillan
HS6	248	2	189	5	B1/B2	Focus, Pearson

Regarding participants, Table 2 shows some characteristics of the seventeen EFL teachers who participated in the study such as age, English proficiency level, EFL teaching qualifications, experience as EFL teachers, and experience of living and studying in an English-speaking country. All the teacher participants taught students

attending the last three years of high school; in other words, students aged 15 to18. The teachers' English proficiency level was determined by a proficiency test, the Longman TOEFL iBT practice test (Phillips, 2017); however, not all the teacher participants took the test since some of them (all the teachers working in HS2 and HS4) had already taken either the First Certificate Test or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) because in these secondary schools a B2 level was a hiring requirement, which was considered more important that an EFL teaching degree. It is worth mentioning that even though teacher #23 was born and raised in the United States until the age of 16 (native-speaker), this teacher did not get the highest proficiency level in the TOEFL exam.

Table 2: *Teacher Participants' Profiles*

School code	Teacher code	Age	Level of English	EFL teaching degree	Teaching experience (in years)	Living in an English speaking country (in years)	Studying in an English speaking country (in years)
HS1	1	40	B2	no	16	0	0
	3	23	B2	student teacher	1	0	0
HS2	7	37	C1	yes	16	2	2
	8	26	C1	no	8	6	6
	9	36	B2	yes	10	1	0
	10	54	C1	no	34	8	8
	11	41	B2	yes	5	5	3
HS3	14	40	B1	yes	15	0	0

	15	30	B1	yes	9	0	0
	18	24	B2	student teacher	2	0	0
HS4	22	26	B2	yes	4	0	0
	23	36	B2	no	17	16	16
	24	46	B2	yes	20	0	0
HS5	25	41	C1	no	18	1	1
	28	23	B2	yes	4	0	0
HS6	29	42	B1	no	1	10	4
	30	46	B1	yes	3	5	2
Total	17						

2.2. Study Design and Data Collection Instruments

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used for the study; according to this type of design, quantitative data (which are collected and analyzed during the first stage of the research) are explored in more depth by analyzing qualitative data (which builds on the quantitative results) (Creswell, 2014). Mixed-methods designs allow deeper understanding of a research problem and thus the achievement of richer conclusions (Mertens, 2015).

Two data collection instruments were used for the study: The Longman practice test for the TOEFL iBT test and The Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme. As mentioned above, the teacher participants who did not have an English proficiency level certificate (9 teachers)

took the first complete test that is included in the CD-ROM that accompanies the book Longman Preparation course for the TOEFL iBT test (Phillips, 2017). This test was selected since it resembles the official TOEFL iBT test; in other words, it testes the four basic language skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking). The reading and listening sections were scored automatically by the software while the writing and speaking sections were graded according to the book instructions; three researchers graded these sections individually and then compared the scores and agreed on the final grade.

In addition, developed by Spada & Fröhlich (1995), the COLT observation scheme was chosen because it allows a systematic way to record instructional practices and procedures in L2 classrooms and thus, the possibility to describe teaching differences; moreover, it includes variables considered as predictors of success of second language learning, and it is underpinned on the theory of communicative language teaching (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995), which is the most accepted approach nowadays (Brown, 2011). The scheme is divided into two parts. Part A allows to give an account of classroom events in terms of episodes and activities, which are timed so that they can be later categorized into participant organization, content, content control, student modality, and materials (see Appendix 1). The first category, participant organization, refers to the way students are organized during a particular activity or episode, that is, as a whole class, in groups, or individually, which allows to differentiate teacher-centered and communicative classrooms, considering that group work is "essential in the development of communicative competence" (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, p.15). The next category, content, allows to determine if the instruction is focused on form or meaning. It

includes the following subcategories: managerial (procedure and discipline), language (form, function, discourse, and sociolinguistics), and other topics (narrow and broad). The latter subcategory refers to *meaning;* which can be considered as *narrow* if the topics dealt with in class are related to the "classroom and the students' immediate environment and experiences", or as *broad* if topics such as "international events, subject-matter instruction, and imaginary/hypothetical events" are discussed; another consideration when deciding whether a topic is *broad* or *narrow* is the degree of deepness with which a topic is addressed (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, p.17). The following category "content control" indicates if the selection of the topic or task dealt with in the classroom depends on the teacher (or the text used) or on the students, considering that according to the communicative language teaching approach, better learning is more likely to occur if students are given the opportunity to "negotiate methods, tasks, materials, and content of instruction" (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, p.17). The next category, student modality, refers to the skills students practice in every activity or episode. Finally, the last category, materials, point out to the type of materials used (text, audio, video); regarding *text*, which refers to written text, two categories can be chosen: *minimal*, if the text consists of "captions, isolated sentences word lists, etc." or *extended*, if it consists of "stories, dialogues, connected sentences, paragraphs, etc." (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, p.19). Another category relates to the source of the materials, that is, if they were designed for non-native speakers, for native speakers, or if they had been adapted based on materials for native speakers.

On the other hand, Part B "analyzes the communicative features of verbal exchanges between teachers and students and/or

students and students as they occur within each episode or activity" (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, p.13). This part of the scheme is divided into two main sections: one for coding the teacher's verbal interaction, which includes categories such as target language, information gap, sustained speech, reaction to form/message, and incorporation of student utterances, while the section for coding the student's verbal interaction includes the same categories as the ones included on the first section as well as two more: discourse initiation and form restriction (see appendix 1).

2.3. Data Collection Procedure

Once the high schools' authorities granted their permission to carry out the study, the teacher participants filled out an informed consent form. Then the TOEFL test was taken by the teachers who did not have a language proficiency certificate, and after that, a date and time was agreed for the class observations. The teacher participants were told that the observer was not going to interfere with their classes and was just going to sit at the back of the classroom to record the whole class using a tape recorder and that they did not have to do anything special, but teach the way they usually do. Each teacher was observed twice; in other words, the COLT observation scheme was used for observing 34 EFL high school classes.

3. Data Analysis and Results

The categories in Part A were coded at the moment of the observation by one researcher (as suggested by Spada & Fröhlich, 1995) who not only filled out the scheme but also audio recorded the class and took notes of relevant aspects such as teachers' errors, ways of providing feedback, type of interaction between teachers and students and among students themselves, and general observations. Moreover, in

order to increase reliability, a second coding was done by a different researcher using the audio of the recorded class, which was compared to the first coding so that any disagreement could be resolved. It is important to mention that the last category, *materials*, was coded only when the teacher used extra material that was not part of the textbook material. Since all the textbooks used in the six educational institutions include material that can be categorized as *minimal texts*, *extended texts*, *audios*, v*isuals*, and *L2NNS*, there was not an important difference regarding this aspect. After coding all the activities and episodes, the percentage of time spent on the different categories was calculated.

Regarding Part B coding, the recorded audios were first transcribed, as recommended by Spada & Fröhlich (1995), so that every teacher's and student's turn (what it is said by a speaker until another one starts talking) could be analyzed. In addition, a "time-sampling procedure", in which coding was done for one minute and stopped for two, was followed (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, p. 66). Two researchers coded part B individually and then compared each other's codifications, reaching agreements when necessary. Next, proportions of each category were calculated by counting the "total number of check marks in a particular category" and dividing it "by the total number of check marks under that particular feature" (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, p. 120). It is important to mention that even though 34 classes were observed, only 18 classes were coded because the classes taught by the same teacher were very similar and only one teacher (T30) did it completely different.

A Spearman correlation test was performed in order to determine any association between the teachers' proficiency level and the variables of Part A of the scheme (participant organization,

content, content control, and student modality). As it can be seen in Table 3, a statistically significant moderate correlation was found with the variable *Other Topics/Broad* (correlation= .606; p= .010), which means that the higher the teachers' proficiency level, the more likely their classes are meaning oriented and address deeper discussions of topics.

Table 3: *Spearman's Correlation of Colt Part A and Teacher's Proficiency*

				Spearman's Correlation	Significance (p)
Teacher verbal interaction	Participant organization	**Class**	T-S/C	-.073	0,782
			S-S/C	-.281	0,274
			Choral	.000	1,000
		Group	Same task	.364	0,150
			Different tasks	-	-
		Individual	Same task	.020	0,940
			Different tasks	-	-
	Content	**Management**	Procedure	-.364	0,150
			Discipline	-	-
		Language	Form	-.273	0,289
			Function	-.106	0,685
			Discourse	-	-
			Sociolinguistics	-	-

		Other topics	Narrow	.000	1,000
			Broad	,606**	0,010
Student verb interaction	**Content control**	**Teacher/Text**		0,000	1,000
		Teacher/Text/Stud.		0,000	1,000
		Student		0,000	1,000
	Student modality	**Listening**		-0,109	.678
		Speaking		-0,228	.380
		Reading		0,141	.590
		Writing		-0,035	.893
		Other		0,281	.274

Likewise, in order to determine any association with part B of the scheme, the Spearman correlation test was used, which yielded four statistically significant correlations. The first one, a negative correlation (correlation= -.671**), is related to the use of the L1, which means that the higher the teachers' English proficiency level, the fewer instances of mother tongue use in their classes (see Table 4). The second correlation (correlation=.564**) was found with the use of the target language, indicating that the higher the teachers' English proficiency level, the higher their use of the target language in the classroom. The next correlation (correlation= -.562*) was established with the variable *predictable information*, which means that the higher the teachers' English proficiency level, the less they question students about information that is already known to both parties.

Finally, the last correlation was observed with the variable *sustained speech* (correlation = 0,578*) which indicates that the higher the teachers' English proficiency level, the more likely they are engaged in extended discourse (at least three main clauses) instead of just producing sentences of minimal length.

Table 4: *Spearman's Correlation of Colt Part B and Teacher's Proficiency*

				Spearman's Correlation	Significance (p)
Teacher verbal interaction	**Target Language**	L1		-,671**	.003
		L2		,564*	.018
	Information gap	**Giving info.**	Predict.	-,562*	0,019
			Unpredict.	.368	.147
		Request info.	Pseudo Request	.177	.496
			Genuine Request	.149	.569
	Sustained speech	Minimal		-.193	.459
		Sustained		,578*	.015
	Reaction to form/message	Form		.070	.789
		Message		.026	.920
	Incorporation of student utterances	Correction		.277	.281
		Repetition		.027	.919
		Paraphrase		.176	.500
		Comment		-.177	.498
		Expansion		.353	.165
		Clarification Request		.361	.155

		Elaboration Request	.274		.287
Student verb interaction	**Discourse initiation**		,255		.000
	Target Language	L1	-.472		.056
		L2	.062		.814
	Information gap	**Giving info.**	Predict.	.255	.324
			Unpredict.	.114	.664
		Request. Info	Pseudo Request	.304	.236
			Genuine Request	-.176	.500
	Sustained Speech	Ultra-minimal	-.079		.763
		Minimal	.166		.523
		Sustained	.310		.225
	Form restriction	Choral	0		1
		Restricted	-.326		.201
		Unrestricted	-.114		.664
	Reaction to form/message	Form	.148		.571
		Message	.000		1,000
	Incorporation of student/ teacher utterances	Correction	.360		.156
		Repetition	.250		.333
		Paraphrase	.000		1,000
		Comment	-.250		.332
		Expansion	.000		1,000
		Clarification Request.	-.281		.274
		Elaboration Request	.281		.274

In order to get a deeper understanding of the quantitative results, a qualitative analysis was conducted. Teaching practices were analyzed in terms of three functional areas in which teaching tasks and routines are carried out—managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson content, and assessing students and providing feedback (Freeman, 2015). To this end, the classrooms transcripts were analyzed in terms of the way each observed teacher performed teaching tasks in each functional area and the problems they faced when using the English language to carry out the teaching tasks.

Regarding the first functional area, managing the classroom, C1 teachers did not have any problems organizing their classrooms. They used English all the time to greet students, make them settle down, and give instructions. If they had to call students attention to focus on the class, they did it from time to time and the students listened to them and changed their behavior right away. Only T7 and T25 made few mistakes when using the language to enact these tasks:

> *T7: "Juan, please remember us what we have to do". This teacher also overused the expression Ok. "Ok, here we got a special guest, here. Ok, but feel exact the way that you are, Ok?"*
>
> *T25: "The less important thing" and "Get in a pairs."*

On the other hand, six out of the nine B2 teachers had no problems greeting students, giving instructions, and making students settle down, using English all the time. However, three teachers faced certain issues. For instance, T23 (native-speaker) had a hard time controlling discipline during the class; this teacher had asked students to go to the front one at the time to talk about some topics

listed on the board, but the rest of the students did not pay attention and spoke Spanish most of the time. In the case of T24, even though this teacher made students settled down from the beginning and did not face discipline problems, T24 made a lot of lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic mistakes when using English. Finally, T28 faced a lot of discipline problems that could not control. Most of the students did not pay attention and spoke Spanish during the whole class. Even though T28 spoke English all the time, this teacher's speech featured many lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic mistakes.

The language errors committed by these B2 teachers when managing the classroom can be summarized as follows:

- Subject-verb agreement: "What happen if Toño has"
- Articles: ¨the question 2," "the speaking," "The last day of the class"
- Syntax: "I don't enough pairs," "You don't know knocking the door?"
- Verb tense: "Later we talk about," "I count to 5," That person is going to lose one point," "You are going to be the ones who are going to losing your time"
- Incomplete sentences: "Well, from what I've read, what I've read briefly…. Ok," "Can you give me…."
- Pronoun reference: The one who don't"
- Misusing the verb give: "I'm going to give (meaning tell) you the rules," "give me the topic"
- Word choice error: "Answer this exercise" "You take like a poster or a flyer to use to your oral presentation next class (meaning you can bring a poster…)" "Write the answers on your desks."
- Indirect questions: "I count to 5 and you decide who are you going to work with."

- Pronunciation: regular past tense /ˈrɛdʒɪstərɛd/, /ənˈlɒkɛd/; incorrect stress: /ˈkontrol/

In relation to the four B1 teachers, most of them did not have any problems greeting students, giving instructions, and making students settle down; only T29 had few problems controlling discipline. Although T29 did not make as many language mistakes as the other 3 teachers, this teacher translated almost everything she said in English, even basic commands such as "Be quiet" and "put everything away." T14 and T15 did not have problems to manage the class, but they made many language mistakes. In the case of T30, during the first observation, this teacher barely talked; T30 made the students complete grammar exercises on their workbooks during the whole class and used signs such as nodding or pointing to communicate with the students. This teacher also stared at students who attempted to talk to their classmates or to stand up. When the students needed help, this teacher approached the students individually and spoke Spanish using lower voice. During the second observation, this teacher spoke a little bit more to organize students and give instructions in English, but made some mistakes using the language.

B1 teachers' mistakes can be summarized as follows:

- Syntax: "Could you explain your classmates?"
- Verb tense: "What does he weight?" (instead of using the present continuous), "These words are going to change" (instead of using the simple present).
- Incomplete sentences: "Ok good, I have to give you... Valeria ok at the end," "phrases or words that help us to …, ok so you are going to do a speaking," Can you talk about what….?"

- Word choice error: "a person that is very bright," "ok you have just remember me" (meaning remind), "What kind of subjects you disagree with" (meaning opinions).
- Pronunciation: regular past tense: /ˈmi:ksed/, incorrect stress: "/ˈkorɛkt/."

In regard to the second functional area, understanding and communicating lesson content, all four C1 teachers communicated the lesson content in a way that engaged the students. Their explanations were accurate and comprehensible; if the students had understanding problems, these teachers repeated their explanations and used more examples. Teachers 8, 10, and 25 made students work individually, in pairs, and in groups. Only T7 organized the students as a whole class during the whole lesson, but this teacher asked follow up questions all the time and made students relate what they were learning to their lives. In addition, this teacher commented about the students' answers, made jokes, and teased some students in a way they enjoyed. On the other hand, T10, who worked in the same high school and taught the exact same content as T7, used many more activities: this teacher started with a song the students loved and continued telling students interesting, personal things using the target structure while their students were free to ask questions at any time. It was a real interaction. Then the students got in groups to talk about their lives using the target structure. After that, they played bingo and later completed a worksheet. The students were provided with a lot of practice and had more opportunities to communicate using the target language. Comparing these 2 classes, it can be said that the one taught by T10 was more fun, engaged the students more, offered more opportunities for practicing, and was more learner-centered (it is important to mention that T10 can be considered a near native

speaker since this teacher's speech and pronunciation were flawless; this teacher lived and studied in the United States for 8 years and does not hold a teaching degree). Similarly, T8 and T25 used different activities and games to explain the lesson content and the students seemed to enjoy the class and understood their explanations. Only T7 and T25 made few mistakes when talking:

> *Teacher 7: "yeah, I didn't look, ok" (meaning I didn't see), "Oh, but, ok but that's mean ok? But it's right, ok"*
>
> *Teacher 25: "In order for to add"*

Similarly, seven out of the nine B2 teachers explained language points in a clear, organized way. However, T23 (native speaker) did not give any explanations and just let students talk about some topics he chose during the whole class; during the second observation, this teacher used the same technique: asked students to freely talk about some topics; therefore, only few students paid attention and participated in the class, while the majority spoke Spanish and did not pay attention. In addition, one part of T9 explanation was confusing: "I have visited Mexico, so that means that I can continue to visit, right?" On the other hand, T1, T11, and T18 used extra material such as short videos and power point presentations that engaged the students more. The rest of the teachers used only the activities from the textbook.

Except from T23, all of these B2 teachers made some mistakes when using the English language. These mistakes can be summarized as follows:

- Subject-verb agreement: "Organic food have," "someone are doing already"

- Articles: "The question 2," "a homework", "the listening", "the question 1."
- Syntax: "In this case is modified the genetic"
- Pronoun reference: "I've lost my keys. It means that in the past I lost it. I can't find it."
- Misusing the verb give: "I'm gonna give you a clap," "I'm gonna give you some types," "give me the auxiliary," "to gives us bad luck," "give me the title."
- Misusing the verb have: How many members do you have? (referring to how many family members)
- Indirect questions: I want you to tell me what is the answer?
- Pronunciation: incorrect stress: "/ˈkorɛkt/", "oliva oil."

On the contrary, two out of the four B1 teachers did not provide clear explanations and even confused students. In fact, T14 said that suffixes were letters that did not have any meaning and later on showed a slide that said that they did have meaning. Likewise, T30 provided a small group of students with incorrect answers to some workbook exercises, and later on when this teacher checked the student's answers with the whole class using the teacher's guide, the students noticed these mistakes and told the teacher, who denied having said the wrong answers. Regarding the other two teachers, T15 did not give any explanations since during the whole class the students listened to some recordings, wrote down the answers to some questions, and completed some sentences. When they finished, T15 checked the answers reading from the teacher's guide. Similarly, T29 used the teacher's guide to check the answers to some workbook exercises. Also, when explaining how to do the next activity (a role play), she translated everything into Spanish. Half of the interaction with the students was in Spanish.

All B1 teachers made many mistakes when using English for communicating content:

- Pronunciation: regular past tense incorrect pronunciation, stressing the wrong syllable, incorrect vowel sounds
- Incomplete sentences
- Word choice error: "You have just remember me to do it." "Listen and read the same things" (meaning listen and read along). "Pover kids," "apply a survey," "stop to use your sheets (meaning stop writing on your sheets of paper).
- Articles: "The number 1 is", "A plastic bottles"

With regards to the final functional area, assessing students and providing feedback, all C1 teachers used different ways to correct students' errors such as repetition of the sentence without the error, pausing before the error so that the students can correct the error by themselves, direct correction accompanied by a short explanation, and just direct correction. All these teachers provided students with accurate feedback. Likewise, six out of the nine B2 teachers mostly repeated the sentence without the error and used direct error correction followed by an explanation (if it was a grammar error) or just direct correction. Nevertheless, three B2 teachers (T1, T22, T28) just ignored students' errors. On the other hand, none of the four B1 teachers corrected students' errors. For example, in T30's class many students said "I'm disagree," and this teacher did not say anything.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between teachers' English proficiency and their teaching practices, for which the performance of 17 teachers working in 6 different private high schools was observed twice. The quantitative results indicate that even

though all the teachers use a textbook as the main guide to their teaching, the more proficient teachers are more likely to expand the topics of discussion suggested in the textbooks; in other words, they are able to elaborate on the topics and encourage students to go deeply on discussions instead of being satisfied with students' shallow answers, since these teachers are able to maintain a sustained speech (more than three main clauses). In addition, the higher proficient teachers give less predictable information ("information which is easily anticipated and known in advance to the questioner" (Spada & Fröhlich,1995, p. 68) and are able to use the target language during the whole class with very few instances of mother tongue use (only when strictly necessary; for example, to make sure students understood a word, after defining and explaining the word in English, few teachers sometimes added the meaning in Spanish). These results support the claim that higher proficient teachers provide students with more and better-quality language input (Sadeghi et al. 2019; Richards, et al. 2013; Turnbull, 2001) which is essential to second language learning (Andrews, 2001; Chambles, 2012; Turnbull, 2001). Moreover, the results endorse that higher proficient teachers are more likely to engage in free-production, improvisational teaching, and target language teaching through the means of the target language (Richards, 2017), and that higher proficient teachers tend to focus more on meaning rather than on accuracy (Eslami and Fatami, 2008).

Nonetheless, the qualitative results show that the English proficiency level does not exert a direct influence on the way the teachers manage the classroom since most of them (except from T23, T28, and T29 who faced discipline issues) did not have any problems organizing their classrooms or making students settle down; in fact,

the strategies all the teachers used to perform these tasks were very similar. Hence, it could be said that classroom management is affected by many factors such as teachers' age, experience, personality, and the type of classroom activities besides language proficiency, since T23 (native speaker) faced similar discipline issues as T28 (B2) and T29 (B1). For instance, T23 (native speaker) listed some topics on the board and asked students to talk about one topic at the front of the class without any previous preparation, so the rest of the class got bored, spoke Spanish all the time, laughed, and did not pay attention. On the other hand, T28 (B2) had planned many different activities but made a lot of language mistakes; since the students in this class had a very good proficient level of English, they noticed the teacher's mistakes and laughed, spoke Spanish, and did not pay attention. Similar results were found by Sadeghi et al. (2019), who reported no relationship between teachers' language proficiency and classroom management. However, the great difference in classroom management was the higher number of errors that the less proficient teachers made when using the English language to carry out the different classroom management tasks.

As for the types of classroom activities, even though a textbook guides all the teachers on the class content and activities, it appears to be a trend that higher proficient teachers use extra material and plan different activities, since 3 out of the 4 C1 teachers (75%), 3 out of the 9 B2 teachers (33%), and 1 out of the 4 B1 teachers (25%) used videos, power point presentations, and many different warm-ups and games in pairs and groups, which were not part of the material offered by the textbook. However, T23(native-speaker) did not use extra material nor planned any activities, and T7(C1) did not use extra material and did not organize the students in pairs or

groups. Besides, since all the teachers knew that they were going to be observed, they could have included many different activities that they do not usually do when not being observed; therefore, a direct influence of teachers' language proficiency on the type of classroom activities cannot be established. Further research can consider to observe classes without previous notice.

With regards to communicating lesson content, the pattern that emerged is the more language proficient teachers the better the explanations provided. As a matter of fact, all C1 teachers provided students with accurate, understandable, and engaging explanations while one B2 teacher's explanation was confusing, and two B1 teachers' explanations were not accurate; in addition, one B1 teacher (T15) did not provide students with any explanations. Even though T23 (native speaker) did not explain anything to the students either, the aforementioned tendency was reflected during the class observations. These results are in agreement with Richards et al. (2013) who pointed out the direct relationship between teachers' proficiency level and the provision of accurate, meaningful explanations, and with Sadeghi et al. (2019), who observed that the more proficient teachers provided better quality metalanguage explanations. Once again, the number of language errors marked a strong difference between higher and lower proficient teachers.

Regarding the last functional area, assessing students and providing feedback, the results show that teacher's language proficiency does exert an influence on error correction since all C1 teachers used different ways to correct students' errors while 3 B2 teachers and all B1 teachers ignored students' errors altogether. These results are also in agreement with Sadeghi et al. (2019) who found

more accurate feedback provided by more proficient language teachers.

Furthermore, based on the comparison of the two C1 teachers' teaching practices (T10 who showed flawless speech and T7 who made some language mistakes), it could be claimed that language proficiency level can override an EFL teaching degree since T10 who does not hold a teaching degree outperformed T7(who does hold that degree) because T10's teaching practices were more learner-centered and provided learners with more opportunities to use the target language for real communication; however, the class taught by the native-speaker teacher makes to reject such claim and to support Richards (2011) assertion that the worst English classes he has observed were taught by native-speaker teachers. Again, these results should be interpreted with caution because only the two C1 teachers' classes are truly comparable since they taught the exact same content using the same textbook in the same high school, which did not happen with the other classes although they were aimed to learners of the same age range who attended the last three years of a private high school in which a similar textbook with similar language objectives and content is used. Mores studies that compare teaching practices of EFL teachers with different proficiency levels teaching at very similar contexts to the same group of students will provide more reliable results. Likewise, the comparison could be based on the proficiency level obtained in every language skill (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) instead of the overall proficiency level, which can also provide more valuable insights.

Certainly, the results provide evidence to assert that higher proficient teachers provide better quality of input and feedback and are better models for students in pronunciation and language use;

nevertheless, they do not clearly indicate how these features influence teacher effectiveness in terms of student learning, which is a crucial issue for further research.

5. Conclusion

A direct relationship between language proficiency and language teaching ability cannot be established since many different variables ("teacher and non-teacher related variables") can influence that connection (Sadeghi et al., 2019, p. 12). Be that as it may, high proficient teachers are more likely to provide better quality input and feedback and to be more accurate language models for their learners. If these abilities are crucial for language learning as many authors have emphasized, EFL teacher education programs should have an equal focus on pedagogy and methodology instruction as well as on target language improvement. Classes to develop "English for teaching" (Freeman, 2017) should be implemented so that student teachers can master the language needed for managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson content, and assessing and giving students feedback, and then classes to continue improving general English proficiency should follow since as Canh and Renandya (2017) have claimed, effective EFL teaching is more likely to take place if EFL teachers have an advanced level of both classroom English language and general English language proficiency.

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Appendix 1

COLT PART A

Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme

School	Grade(s)	Observer
Teacher	Lesson (min.)	Visit No.
Subject	Date	Page

TIME	ACTIVITIES & EPISODES	PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATION							CONTENT								CONTENT CONTROL			STUDENT MODALITY					MATERIALS							
		Class			Group		Indiv.		Manag.		Language				Other. Topics										Type				Source			
																									Text							
		T-S/C	S-S/C	Choral	Same task	Different tasks	Same task	Different tasks	Procedure	Discipline	Form	Function	Discourse	Socioling.	Narrow	Broad	Teacher/Text	Teacher/Text/Stud.	Student	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Other	Minimal	Extended	Audio	Visual	L2-NNS	L2-NS	L2-NSA	Student-made
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33

COLT PART B

Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme

School		Date of visit
Teacher	Subject	

			TEACHER VERBAL INTERACTION																		STUDENT VERB INTERACTION																					
				Target Language		Information gap				Sustained speech		Reaction to form/ message		Incorporation of student utterances								Target Language		Information gap				Sustained Speech			Form restriction			Reaction to form/ message		Incorporation of sudent/ teacher utterances						
						Giving info		Request info																Giving info.		Request. Info																
A	E	M	Off task	L1	L2	Predict	Unpredict.	Pseudo requ.	Genuine requ.	Minimal	Sustained	Form	Message	Correction	Repetition	Paraphrase	Comment	Expansion	Clarif. Request.	Elab. Request	Discourse initiation	L1	L2	Predict.	Unpred.	Pseudo Req.	Genuine Requ.	Ultra-minimal	Minimal	Sustained	Choral	Restricted	Unsrestrictic	Form	Message	Correction	Repetition	Paraphrase	Comment	Expansion	Clarif. Request	Elab. Request
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40

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