

Original Paper

Assessing First-Cycle Primary School English Language Teachers' Speaking Proficiency

Girma Abate Baisa, Rufael Disaasaa Worabu & Teshale Tefera Belachew

English Language Teacher, Wollega University, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the speaking proficiency of English teachers in the first-cycle primary school employed a convergent mixed design method, with a specific focus on the East Wollega Zone. Utilizing sophisticated probability sampling, fifteen and ten English teachers underwent randomly assigned Oral Proficiency Tests and classroom observations, respectively. Descriptive statistical analysis uncovered a notable deficiency in overall speaking proficiency, as indicated by a combined mean score of 2.65, falling below the required standard. Independent sample t-tests revealed subpar Oral Proficiency Test outcomes for both male and female teachers, with p-values exceeding .05 for all components except pronunciation. Through a comprehensive assessment integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study consistently highlighted below-average speaking proficiency among English teachers. The results emphasize the imperative for targeted interventions and professional development initiatives to elevate the speaking proficiency of primary-level English teachers. The research provides critical insights by identifying specific areas of deficiency in speaking proficiency, particularly in pronunciation. These findings underscore the intricate nature of language proficiency and serve as a foundational guide for future research and policy considerations to enhance English language instruction in the early stages of education, addressing identified proficiency gaps and fostering a more effective learning environment.

Keywords

Assess, Speaking proficiency, English language teachers, First-cycle, Component

1. Introduction

Language proficiency, as described by scholars, relates to one's ability to communicate in a variety of ways using a language, including reading, writing, speaking, and understanding (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Proficient users demonstrate ease in comprehension, clear expression of concepts both orally and

in writing, as well as in comfortable conversation with other speakers (Richards, 2018). According to Richards (2018), English language proficiency (ELP) is the capacity to converse successfully in English both in spoken and written. This proficiency, acknowledged as a fundamental ability in the process of communication (Smith & Johnson, 2021), is the ability to utilise language, especially English, to interact with others in an efficient manner. It has a direct impact on one's performance. As a result, someone can interact with written materials or communicate with others more readily and successfully if they can read, write, listen, and speak English clearly.

The ability to communicate in language is essential for academic success. English is the language that is most frequently used to write about recognised scientific and technological breakthroughs, thus someone who cannot speak or understand the language may not be able to access them (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009). Comparably, teachers' beliefs about their capacity to instruct can either be positively or negatively impacted by their level of language ability (Chacon, 2005; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008). This proved that a language teacher cannot effectively instruct students unless they possess a solid command of the language. On the contrary, inadequate language proficiency among teachers may limit their capacity to instruct students in English, identify mistakes made by them, as well as possibly even hinder them from consistently applying correct grammar (Farrell, 2007; Richards, 2017). Furthermore, Lee (2002) pointed out that because of their poor English ability, teachers in primary schools were unable to impart conversational skills. Overall, a teacher's proficiency in the English language may influence their students' academic success.

There are many different reasons why people speak English nowadays, all around the world. For example, most speakers of English, both native and non-native utilise English as their main language of communication in work environments since it is a common language. English has become the standard language that the fastest degree of expansion in the modern time since it links the North and the South, as well as the East and the West. Almost all sectors of the global economy, including science, technology, engineering, medicine, exchanges and business, education, scientific investigation, travel, the online, commercial, banking, advertising, use English (Parupalli Srinivas Rao, 2019). Furthermore, English serves as the dominant language among global researchers, and those fluent in English typically have a greater understanding of fundamental research vocabulary compared to speakers of other languages. In conclusion, English has become more significant globally in a range of circumstances (Parupalli Srinivas Rao, 2019).

Comparably, Ethiopia is among the nations where the English language is becoming more widely used in research, education, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and for a host of other important functions. English holds a predominant and widely acknowledged position in Ethiopia, primarily serving the purpose of education and instruction. Additional growing functions that English is playing are those in commerce and business communication, certain forms of advertising and entertainment, administration and office communication in non-governmental organisations (Amlaku, 2013). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education (2009) recommended that children be taught in English

beginning from kindergarten, with an emphasis on helping them build their basic interpersonal abilities. Likewise it is stated unequivocally in this document that students should begin learning English as a subject in first grade countrywide. All in all, within Ethiopian contexts, there has been a discernible upward trend in the prevalence and application of the English language over time.

English usage in Ethiopia has occasionally increased in a variety of contexts, including technology and science, certain national and international organisations, as well as institutions both governmental and non-governmental; however, there have been predictions by some academics that English teachers' competency in the language has decreased. This indicates that although Ethiopian academics have said that English teachers' proficiency in the language is low, they have not conducted interviews or oral proficiency tests to back up their assertions. For example, Negash (2006) claimed throughout his book "Education in Ethiopia: From Crisis to Brink of Collapse" that the standard of instruction, encompassing fluency in English, seemed to decline beginning with the Derg regime. Similarly, Dereje (2012) noted within his book that although teachers regard their own English language proficiency and teaching abilities as strong points, these attributes seemed insufficient to carry out the projects and exercises that are represented as intended in the English textbooks.

However, even though speaking fluent English is vital in academic settings, teaching the language is widely recognised as a difficult undertaking, especially in developing nations where English is required of all students from kindergarten to university. Almost every aspect of human life is closely related to English, including science, technology, education, health, entertainment, and more (Harmer, 2001). Moreover, the effectiveness of non-native English speaking (NNES) teachers is well considered to have significant impact on the methods of instruction, including the selection and application of teaching approaches, along with the level of education they provide to the pupils (Farrell, 2007).

There is crucial inquiry about what language proficiency level non-native English-speaking (NNES) teachers ought to possess. Several nations possess benchmarks unique to their English teaching and learning environments. However, because there is not much research being done on language proficiency for teaching purposes, it is standard to assess teachers' language competency using universal language proficiency tests.

In terms of the competency of English language teachers, foreign investigators have carried out empirical research with the goal of determining the teachers' English proficiency levels by gathering information from participants and then analysing the data acquired. For example, Al-Mekhlafi (2007) noted that the majority of English as foreign language (EFL) teachers are not at the required degree of language ability and have difficulties in their jobs. Moreover, Butler (2004) carried out studies under the topic "What Level of English Proficiency Do Elementary School Teachers Need to Attain to Teach English as a Foreign Language: Case Studies from Korea, Taiwan, and Japan." The inquiry's findings showed that a substantial percentage of primary-level Taiwanese teachers, Japan, and Korea thought their degrees of proficiency fell below of what was needed to teach English effectively in accordance with the current educational policies.

In a similar vein, In the Ethiopian context, researchers like Bachore (2015), Amlaku (2010, 2013) and Dereje (2012) have discussed the proficiency of teachers and students, indirectly touching upon the issue of English language teachers' proficiency. To designate the elements of Proficiency in English speaking among teachers, these researchers could not, however, exactly gather information about speaking to tackle the problem of speaking fluently at work. Furthermore, during their assessments of English language teachers' proficiency, these researchers notably omitted the administration of specific tests, such as the Oral Proficiency Test (OPT).

Several local research papers have been taken into consideration in order to highlight the viewpoints of the aforementioned researchers. For example, Dereje (2012) contended that, in spite of teachers' self-perceptions about their strong instructional and English language proficiency, there is evidence to suggest that these skills are insufficient to enable teachers to carry out the tasks and activities outlined in English textbooks as intended.

Furthermore, Bachore (2015) conducted a study on "The Status, Roles, and Challenges of Teaching English Language in the Ethiopian Context: The Case of selected Primary and Secondary Schools in the Hawassa University Technology Village Area." The primary objective of the study was to ascertain the state, responsibilities, and difficulties associated with teaching English within the context of Ethiopia. Its study design was a survey, and collected data via interviews and questionnaires. It should be noted that Mebratu did not give participants English proficiency tests to ascertain the English teachers' spoken proficiency levels; instead, the present study's researcher employed classroom observation and spoken English proficiency tests, such as the Oral Proficiency Test, as major methods of data collection.

Additionally, Amlaku (2010, 2013) carried out a research titled "Language Policies and the Role of English in Ethiopia." The research's findings showed that, despite the attempts made by the government of Ethiopia and relevant associations, Ethiopian learners' proficiency within the language remained consistently low, and there was no discernible difference between the English language teachers' proficiency and that of the learners.

Li et al. (2010) stated that the English proficiency of language teachers can dramatically alter academic situations. However, in contrast, it is evident that teachers are not fluent in English as a factor influencing their spoken contributions during English teaching-learning sessions in the classroom. Furthermore, Lee (2002) pointed out that primary school teachers' poor English ability prevented them from teaching communicative skills in an effective manner. This implies that pupils' academic achievement may be impacted by a teacher's proficiency in the English language.

Unexpectedly, a significant proportion of Ethiopian primary school English teachers frequently utilise their native languages in place of English when teaching the language. The researcher observed teachers' poor English language proficiency during practicum supervision visits to primary schools, which may account for the classroom's utilisation of L1. Similar to this, the researcher has noticed that primary school English language teachers' speaking competency is questioning throughout a number of

training courses offered as part of the English Language Improvement Programmes (ELIP) by the College of Teacher Education (CTE) and the Oromia Education Bureau. As far as the researcher is understanding, no previous study has been carried out to administer speaking English proficiency exams in order to assess English teachers' levels of proficiency in speaking the language in Ethiopian situations; furthermore, not enough relevant information has been gathered and examined by the relevant experts to comprehend the teachers' levels of fluency in English and address the related issues; and lastly, most local researchers focused on students' English proficiency rather than teachers' English proficiency. For these reasons, a study evaluating the speaking English proficiency levels of first-cycle primary school English teachers in the Ethiopian context is required.

Thus, the study intends to fill these research gaps by assessing English teachers fluency in speaking in first-cycle primary schools and studying the impact of demographic factors specifically, gender. It is critical to assess teachers' English language speaking proficiency and study the possible influence of gender differences on their level of linguistic proficiency. As a result, this investigation will contribute to filling current research gaps by assessing the English teachers' speaking ability in the Ethiopian setting using the subsequent specific expectations.

- To assess first-cycle primary school English teachers' speaking proficiency level.
- To ascertain if male and female first-cycle primary school English language teachers differ significantly in their speaking ability.

2. Materials and Methods

Within this section, the research is included in the precise approach that is used paradigm, design, population, data gathering instruments, and analysis methods. The chosen paradigm, pragmatism, offers flexibility in mixed-method research, accommodating diverse techniques and maintaining objectivity and subjectivity (Shannon-Baker, 2015).

Adopting a mixed research approach under pragmatism enhances research quality by integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, with an emphasis on methodological triangulation for a robust understanding of the research problem (Dornyei, 2007). The convergent design, grounded in pragmatism, integrates quantitative and qualitative data for a comprehensive analysis, ensuring credibility and validity of results (Creswell, 2014).

Mixed-method research strategically integrates the vigorous aspects of quantitative and qualitative methods, orchestrating the nuanced acquisition of data through systematic administration of English proficiency tests and classroom observations. This methodological convergence, as articulated by Creswell and Creswell (2017) in their seminal work, significantly contributes to a more comprehensive and sophisticated comprehension of the topic being examined. Within the confines of the study, the focal point resides in the systematic evaluation of the proficiency levels exhibited by primary school English teachers. Through the deliberate triangulation of findings, underscored by scholars such as Cohen et al. (2018), this approach not only strengthens the methodological rigor of the study but also

facilitates the thoughtful extrapolation of results to a broader contextual domain. The consolidation of quantitative and qualitative dimensions within the mixed-method paradigm enriches the scholarly discourse, fostering a nuanced exploration that adeptly navigates and addresses research questions from a multifaceted perspective.

Sampling and sample Techniques

In this research, fifteen English teachers took part in Oral Proficiency Test (OPT) assessments, and ten teachers were engaged in classroom observations. Participants were chosen from a total of 203 English teachers in East Wollega Zone using a thorough random sampling method. The selection of research sites adhered to a rigorous random sampling methodology, ensuring equal opportunities for school participation. The decision to focus on this specific region and zone took into account the researcher's proximity and nationally standardized English teaching practices, aiming to facilitate effective communication. Consequently, a simple random technique was employed to choose fifteen primary schools and five woredas, enhancing the correctness of the study's design.

Data Gathering Tools

In this research endeavor, a meticulous approach to data collection was undertaken through the integration of two distinct instruments: Oral Proficiency Test (OPT) and classroom observations. The OPT, derived and adapted from well-established assessments such as IELTS and TOEFL, was purposefully crafted to evaluate proficiency in spoken English, aligning with the criteria outlined by the International English Language Testing System (IELTS, 2021). Additionally, the observation items employed during classroom assessments were sourced from Nunan's seminal work in 1989, providing a comprehensive and validated framework for systematic examination. This methodological fusion allowed for a multifaceted exploration of language proficiency, encompassing both controlled testing conditions and authentic classroom interactions, thereby enhancing the robustness of the study's findings.

Data collection Procedures

Evaluation criteria were established by using clear and concise rubrics to gauge the speaking skills of English teachers. Instead of only tallying faults, the raters utilised an analytical scoring system that prioritised the recording of significant speech components. A more thorough and impartial assessment of the participants' speaking ability was made possible by this method. Grammar, pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and complexity were among the main speaking components that were the focus of the rubrics, which gave each one a score between one and five based on a range of proficiency.

There were two sections to the OPT test that was designed to evaluate English teachers' speaking skills. Speaking proficiency was assessed in the first section of the test using an oral interview format. The teacher interviews were conducted by the researcher, who also recorded the interviewer-respondent conversation. Here, the teachers were supposed to use their own words and sentences to create coherent communication. The English teachers attempted to choose a topic to give an oral presentation on during

the second section of the test.

It is imperative to concentrate on the objectivity and precision of scoring processes as they contribute to improving measurement consistency within a research section. Based on the scoring techniques, the researcher examined Brown (2014), who offers explicit recommendations that speaking assessments must have significant elements that raters concentrate on in order to assign English language teachers' ratings in accordance with their proficiency. According to Coombe et al. (2012), there is also the opinion that objective and relevant assessment of teachers' speaking competency requires the establishment of systematic scoring procedures. Specific marking points were allocated to each of these components to the score in order to promote uniform and objective scoring recommendations made by Coombe et al. (2012), and the guidelines given in the Speaking Assessment Rubric.

The researcher collected quantitative data through oral English proficiency tests, which included interviews and oral presentations recorded by a video man. To validate the data, classroom observations was conducted to check the grammar, Pronunciation, fluency, relationships between teachers and students, and English comprehension ability of the teachers. Thus, Open-ended inquiries guided the observations, and recorded utilising both audio and visual apparatus. To sum up, the meticulous data collection process comprised securing necessary permissions, administering proficiency tests, and conducting insightful classroom observations to evaluate first-cycle primary school English language teachers' proficiency in speaking.

3. Method of Data Analysis

This study used a comprehensive research technique to smoothly merge descriptive and inferential statistical analysis with narrative methodologies, allowing for a thorough examination of the research inquiries. The quantitative dimension was thoroughly examined using SPSS version 26:00, which included rigorous statistical processes such as means, standard deviations, and a full normality assessment in strict conformity to recognized guidelines (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). Simultaneously, qualitative data was subjected to a careful narrative analysis, which included systematic categorization and organization of material based on components of speaking proficiency.

Results

The outcomes of the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data were presented in this section. In order to determine whether or not the suggested statistical techniques and data gathering tools were appropriate for the intended uses, descriptive and inferential statistics from the data analysis were used to investigate the quantitative data. In contrast, the qualitative data were subjected to a thematic analysis and were examined in this section in order to determine whether the results corroborate or contradict the quantitative results. Therefore, the data analysis and interpretation were directed, respectively, by the following study questions.

Speaking proficiency of English teachers in first-cycle primary schools

The initial research inquiries focused on assessing speaking proficiency level of first-cycle elementary

school English language teacher. The researcher did classroom observations in order to get information for the study questions. After that, OPT was given out orally and through interviews. Using both descriptive and inferential statistics, the test findings were examined and evaluated. The following speaking proficiency score rubric values were used to rate the teachers' level of speaking proficiency. One, extremely low; two, low; three, moderate; four, high; and, five, very high (Gul & Aziz, 2015). Each of the six components of the proficiency test is rated out of five points. Consequently, the test has a 30-point rating.

Table 1. English Teachers' Proficiency Level in Speaking

No	Categories/skill	Mean	CM	CSD
1	Comprehension	2.63		
2	Pronunciation	2.63		
3	Fluency	2.67		
4	Grammar	2.67	2.65	.74
5	Vocabulary	2.73		
6	Complexity	2.60		

The categories and skills associated with the oral speaking proficiency components were revealed in Table 1. The speaking proficiency components' total mean score, as displayed in the table, was 2.65 +.74 out of a possible 5, indicating a low level of speaking proficiency among teachers. Teachers' proficiency in each component varies, as evidenced by the mean scores for each component. The table shows that teachers have the highest English vocabulary score ($M = 2.73$), then came grammar and fluency ($M = 2.67$), pronunciation and comprehension ($M = 2.63$), and a low mean score for complexity ($M = 2.6$). This suggests that while the teachers were almost average in terms of grammar, fluency, complexity, pronunciation, and comprehension, they excelled in vocabulary compared to other spoken English proficiency components.

For the purpose of this study, data gathered via in-person classroom observations was thoroughly analysed. This indicates that the data was initially sorted and categorised based on the speaking ability components. Subsequently, a quantitative analysis was conducted utilising relevant words. The majority of respondents utilised their native tongue when teaching English, despite the fact that the sampled teachers were observed in authentic settings. This indicates that they were speaking in their native tongue instead of the intended language. Furthermore, the majority of the English teachers' poor vocabulary, grammatical usage, and sentence structures were the main issues noted throughout the class observation sessions. Problems with the English teachers' pronunciation, accuracy, complexity, and fluency were also observed during the English period. This suggested that the OPT results and the data outputs gathered through classroom observation were correlated. The findings from the observations in

the classroom thus showed that majority of the observed school's English language teachers' speaking proficiency was under doubt or questionable.

This study uses a convergent design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data and analysing them simultaneously or in parallel with one another at the same phase of the investigation procedure. The analysis indicates a significant pattern of poor speaking ability, especially among those who use the phrase "convergent mixed methods of OPT" (mean of 2.65, standard deviation of 0.74). Corroborating evidence from the examination of classroom observation data supports this result. The findings are more consistent due to the convergence of quantitative measures and qualitative insights, which offer a thorough knowledge of the issue of low speaking proficiency within the given research conditions.

English Speaking Proficiency Variations by Gender

The investigation into disparities in male and female English language usage has been a persistent focus of research. This study specifically centers on delineating the speaking competency components among male and female English teachers. The primary objective is to precisely document variations across multiple facets of language usage and articulate the adjustments implemented to address these disparities. The following presentation of gender disparity group statistics is systematically organized within the subsequent tables, providing a comprehensive overview of mean scores. This scholarly pursuit contributes to our understanding of gender-specific linguistic patterns and serves as a valuable resource for teachers and linguists alike.

Table 2. Gender Differences in Descriptive Statistics for the Oral Proficiency Test

Components	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Comprehension	Male	10	2.75	0.63	0.20
	Female	5	2.40	0.82	0.37
Pronunciation	Male	10	2.90	0.61	0.19
	Female	5	2.10	0.74	0.33
Fluency	Male	10	2.85	0.58	0.18
	Female	5	2.30	0.97	0.44
Grammar	Male	10	2.90	0.70	0.22
	Female	5	2.20	0.76	0.34
Vocabulary	Male	10	2.80	0.71	0.23
	Female	5	2.60	0.96	0.43
complexity	Male	10	2.70	0.63	0.20
	Female	5	2.40	0.89	0.40

The group statistical mean of the components of English teachers' speaking competency were reported in Table 2 above according to the gender differences. The table showed that male English teachers in

primary schools performed higher in speaking proficiency than their female counterparts. According to the descriptive statistics, the mean scores of the male English teachers for components of their English speaking proficiency, the results showed practically average performance in terms of comprehension ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.63$), pronunciation ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.61$), fluency ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.56$), grammar ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.70$), vocabulary ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.71$), and complexity ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.63$). The proficiency levels of female English teachers were found to be below average across multiple dimensions as indicated by mean scores in various areas. Specifically, the mean scores for comprehension were recorded at $M = 2.40$, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.82 . Pronunciation scores averaged $M = 2.1$, with an SD of 0.74 , while fluency demonstrated a mean of $M = 2.3$ ($SD = 0.97$). Grammar proficiency was reflected in a mean score of $M = 2.2$, accompanied by an SD of 0.76 . Vocabulary skills exhibited a mean of $M = 2.6$, with an SD of 0.96 , and complexity scores were represented by a mean of $M = 2.4$ ($SD = 0.89$). In summary, the data collected from respondents through the Proficiency Test indicates that male English teachers surpassed their female counterparts in overall performance on the speaking proficiency test. The analysis of classroom observation data revealed that male English teachers outperformed their female counterparts in speaking proficiency. However, it is noteworthy that the observed disparities between the two genders did not attain statistical significance. Notably, the analytical outputs derived from the data collected through the Oral Proficiency Test (OPT) and the findings from classroom observations exhibited a high degree of similarity. This suggests a robust correlation between the OPT results and the outcomes of the analysis conducted on the data obtained through classroom observation. The convergence of findings from these distinct sources adds credibility to the conclusion that male English teachers demonstrated superior speaking proficiency, as evidenced by both the OPT and classroom observation data analyses.

The convergence of findings from the quantitative and qualitative evidence analysis and presentation was carried out using several procedures. At the beginning, every kind of data was examined separately. It was clear from interpretation that both genders' speaking abilities were being scrutinised. Notably, the results produced by the quantitative and qualitative datasets nearly matched one another. This alignment suggested a consistent pattern across the many techniques used for data collection and analysis, which enhanced the findings' overall reliability. After these convergent results were integrated, a thorough grasp of the complex variables impacting the perceived low speaking proficiency levels in both genders was obtained.

Table 3. The Outputs of Oral Proficiency Test of Gender Differences

Components	Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means				95% CID		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-t)	M D	SED	Lower	Upper
Comprehension	.928	.353	.916	13	.376	.35	.382	-.475	1.175
			.836	6.486	.433	.35	.419	-.656	1.356
Pronunciation	.120	.735	2.225	13	.044	.80	.359	.023	1.577
			2.081	6.860	.077	.80	.384	-.113	1.713
Fluency	2.35	.149	1.39	13	.189	.55	.397	-.307	1.407
			1.16	5.464	.293	.55	.473	-.635	1.735
Grammar	.008	.931	1.780	13	.098	.70	.393	-.149	1.549
			1.729	7.520	.124	.70	.405	-.244	1.644
Vocabulary	.116	.739	.457	13	.655	.20	.438	-.745	1.145
			.412	6.302	.694	.20	.486	-.975	1.375
Complexity	1.228	.288	.757	13	.462	.30	.396	-.556	1.156
			.671	6.08	.527	.30	.447	-.791	1.391

Table 3 presents the results detailing statistically significant differences in speaking proficiency between male and female English teachers. The outcomes for comprehension, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and complexity tests are outlined with corresponding values: $t(0.35) = 0.916$, $p = 0.376$, $df = 13$; $t(0.55) = 1.39$, $p = 0.189$, $df = 13$; $t(0.7) = 1.78$, $p = 0.098$, $df = 13$; $t(0.2) = 0.457$, $p = 0.655$, $df = 13$; $t(0.3) = 0.757$, $p = 0.462$, $df = 13$, respectively. Importantly, the significance (p) values for these proficiency components exceeded the conventional alpha cut-off of 0.05, indicating no statistically significant differences between genders except for pronunciation, where a significant distinction emerged ($t(0.8) = 2.225$, $p = 0.044$, $df = 13$). This comprehensive analysis underscores the insignificant variations in speaking proficiency between male and female English teachers, emphasizing specific areas of significance, particularly in the domain of pronunciation.

In examining data from classroom observations, gender differences among study participants were carefully considered. Notably, English teachers faced challenges delivering lessons in the target language during actual classes, even though English is the designated medium of instruction. Surprisingly, a majority of teachers predominantly used their native language, revealing a noteworthy discrepancy. The researcher encountered a significant hurdle during classroom visits, revealing shortcomings in teachers' vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures. These challenges encompassed difficulties in comprehension, constructing complex sentences, pronunciation errors, and issues with fluency and accuracy. Despite these observed challenges, the data indicated no statistically significant differences in speaking skills between genders. This suggests that a majority of English language teachers in the observed school exhibited speaking skills below average, emphasizing the need for

targeted interventions to enhance overall speaking proficiency in the English teaching context. The study used a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data designs in accordance with established research practices. Within this framework, the convergent design emerged as a valuable subset, guiding the effective integration of qualitative and quantitative analyses. Utilizing independent sample t-tests, our results indicated that, with the exception of pronunciation in the Oral Proficiency Test (OPT), all p-values exceeded 0.05, suggesting a lack of statistical significance in observed differences. Particularly, a notable consistency emerged between quantitative and qualitative data gathered through classroom observation, reinforcing the convergent nature of our findings. This methodological synthesis enhances the robustness of our study, providing a comprehensive understanding of the study subject by combining information from qualitative and quantitative perspectives.

4. Discussion

The study discussion aimed to elucidate the importance of study results in relation to the investigated problem. It also highlighted any new insights that emerged after considering the findings, avoiding mere repetition of the introduction. This section advanced the reader's understanding of the research problem, building on the questions posed and the literature reviewed earlier.

The study utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Quantitative data were obtained through the use of the Oral Proficiency Test (OPT), while qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations. Oral Proficiency Test involved interviews and oral presentations, with recorded speech transcribed and rated based on speaking assessment rubrics outlined by Gul and Aziz (2015), encompassing components of English language proficiency.

The study categorized results based on the gender of the sampled English teachers, prioritizing the analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative data. This strategic approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of patterns and insights derived from both data types. Additionally, the section acknowledges inherent research limitations, identifies potential gaps for future research, and investigates into the implications of the findings. By integrating these components, the study aims to draw meaningful and well-founded conclusions that contribute to a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

The study established the reliability of the data collection tool through dual-rater validation. Cronbach's alpha coefficient assessed the internal consistency of English Proficiency Tests (OPT) items, and Pearson's coefficient measured the correlation between scores from two raters. A robust positive association ($r = 96.9\%$) in oral proficiency test outcomes indicated strong reliability. The speaking components in the OPT showed alignment with target constructs, supported by calculated Cronbach alpha coefficients. The analysis, consistent with studies by Taherdoost (2018), utilized cut-off points for reliability, indicating excellent reliability (0.90 and above). Streiner (2003) further supported the findings, highlighting the significance of calculated alpha values in relation to internal consistency and

reliability.

The initial inquiry aimed to discern mean score differences across various proficiency levels among English teachers, ranging from very high to very low proficiency. Utilizing both descriptive statistics and classroom observations, it became evident that the proficiency level of English teachers in speaking skills was notably low. This observation aligns with Arshad's (2009) study, which highlighted competency gaps in areas such as vocabulary, oral communication, pronunciation, intonation, assessment, and test preparation—consistent with the outcomes of the present study. Moreover, our findings resonate with Edward's (2010) research, wherein teachers scored lowest in comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary, complexity, fluency, and grammar, as assessed by their peers. These parallels across studies provide robust support for the identified proficiency level outcomes and underscore the broader consistency of challenges faced by English teachers in specific skill areas.

The second research question aimed to identify any statistical differences in speaking proficiency components between male and female English language teachers. The study found no significant differences ($P > 0.05$) except in pronunciation. Descriptive statistics suggested slightly better performance by males, with observations indicating low proficiency for male teachers and very low proficiency for females. This aligns with discussions by Johnson (2017) and Smith (2018) on gender differences in communication, emphasizing language styles. Recent sociolinguistic analyses highlight distinctions in pronunciation, prosodic cues, grammatical forms, vocabulary choices, and nonverbal communication, where females tend to use more eye contact, gestures, and smiles compared to males (Hall et al., 2019).

5. Conclusion

The study's thorough analysis makes it clear that the findings of the oral proficiency test and the observations made in the classroom leading to significant conclusions. The descriptive statistics that were computed clearly show that first-cycle primary school English teachers have a low level of speaking proficiency. This is valid for both the observations made in the classroom and the oral proficiency tests. Moreover, the study's independent sample t-test reveals a lack of discernible differences in the complexity, fluency, grammar, comprehension, and vocabulary exhibited by male and female English teachers based on how well they accomplish on the oral proficiency test (OPT). This statistical analysis underscores the absence of significant gender-related variations in key aspects of language proficiency, providing valuable insights into the comparable competence levels of male and female English teachers in these specific linguistic domains. Paradoxically, in spite of this general resemblance, there is a discernible difference in pronunciation across the sexes, as the OPT findings demonstrate.

Overall, the study emphasizes the necessity of focused interventions to improve speaking proficiency of first-cycle primary school English teachers, especially in the areas of pronunciation that were shown to be problematic. The careful analysis of gender variations in OPT results adds a significant dimension to

our knowledge, indicating the need for more research and specialized assistance for teachers in developing proficient spoken language skills.

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