Assessment of the Language Proficiency and Its Correlation to Classroom Language: A Case Study on Primary School English Teacher

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Abstract

The rapid development of educational system in Indonesia is reflected from the growth number of educational institution. Relevant studies shown for the last ten years, parental decision in Indonesia tends to prefer private schools for their children to public one with a rationale that teachers in private schools offer more quality. This study aims to investigate the language proficiency of the teachers in One Earth School, Denpasar Bali, based on CEFR assessment framework and its relation to the ability of teachers in performing classroom language. This study employs a case study design with three teachers as the subjects. The teachers selected are those who fulfilling the criteria to be subjects seen from its experience and actively engaged in professional development. The data are collected by utilizing several means such as speaking test proficiency with CEFR based assessment, document study, and field observation. This study is expected to give contribution on empowering English teachers to engage in professional development and displaying a clear picture whether or not teachers with certain proficiency levels could successfully transform them in classroom language.

Keywords: English Proficiency, Classroom Language, Primary English Teachers

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), language learners primarily acquire the language within the classroom environment, where they receive the majority of

their exposure. This is particularly true for young learners, who heavily rely on teachers to employ effective teaching methods, strategies, assessments, and appropriate teaching media to enhance their language production (Agustin, 2021; Febyawati et al., 2021). However, it is important to note that the dynamics of language exposure differ in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) where learners are surrounded by the target language outside of the classroom.

The classroom setting plays a crucial role in EFL language acquisition as it provides a structured and supportive environment for learners. Within this setting, teachers employ various instructional methods to expose students to different aspects of the English language (Effendi-Hasibuan et al., 2020; Graham, 2017; Zou & Zhang, 2022). For instance, teachers may use lectures, discussions, group activities, and multimedia resources to engage students in language learning. These activities encourage active participation and interaction, enabling students to practice and develop their language skills in a controlled and guided manner.

Moreover, the role of teachers in the EFL classroom is vital in fostering language production (Aghaei et al., 2020; Qi, 2018). They serve as facilitators, guiding students in their language learning journey. Effective teachers employ appropriate teaching methods and strategies tailored to the needs and proficiency levels of their students. By using a variety of techniques such as explicit instruction, modelling, and scaffolding, teachers can support students in understanding and using the English language effectively.

In addition to teaching methods and strategies, the choice of teaching media also significantly impacts language exposure in the EFL classroom (Ahmadi & Ilmiani, 2020). Teachers utilize a range of materials such as textbooks, supplementary resources, audio-visual materials, and online platforms to provide students with authentic and engaging language input (Sekeh, 2021). These resources expose learners to different registers, vocabulary, grammar structures, and cultural aspects of the English language, thereby expanding their linguistic and cultural knowledge.

With such a dependability from the students, teachers are expected to live up with such challenges and expectation (Lan & Fan, 2019). It is not that easy to be the source of language input in current education situation where the instructions in class is back to offline learning after approximately two years of online learning. Teachers who get used to online learning needs to relive the atmosphere of being present in person in the classroom (Afrilyasanti & Basthomi, 2022). During the pandemic, teachers had to quickly adapt to online teaching methods and rely on digital platforms to deliver language instruction remotely. However, as students gradually return to physical classrooms, teachers must readjust to the in-person environment, which brings forth its own set of obstacles. One of the primary challenges lies in re-establishing the role of teachers as the primary source of language input.

Though it is not a sole determinant of effective teaching, teacher proficiency in speaking the language influences the authenticity of language input to students (Banegas, 2020; Copriady et al., 2018). When it comes to be the source of language input, teachers are required to possess a solid foundation of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. It enables them to model the language effectively as an accurate example for students to follow. Moreover, good proficiency levels also contribute to the ability to adjust their language input to the learners' proficiency levels. Proficient teachers can gauge the linguistic abilities and

needs of their students and tailor their language input accordingly. In other words, the ability to apply classroom language depends heavily on teacher proficiency level.

Prior to this study, the researchers had conducted a preliminary observation to study the phenomenon in schools related to the implementation of classroom language. The researchers studied the phenomenon that primary schools, according to Indonesian previous curriculum, has no obligation to teach English to primary school students. The changes in curriculum have great impact toward teachers' proficiency level. For instance, based on the interview done in SDN 2 Mengwi. There was confusion amongst English teachers as the subject was not taught as compulsory subject, yet it is taught as local content subject. This condition leads to students that have lack of exposure toward the target language. This may hinder their language development and proficiency, as language acquisition relies on consistent exposure and practice. More importantly, as teachers in that school reveal through an interview, they experience language attrition since the target language is rarely used in the classroom. In other words, teachers do not have enough opportunity to develop the necessary language teaching skills.

With recent curriculum where the English subject is back into the list does not instantly become solution to the aforementioned problems. The absence of English instruction has made it more challenging for teachers to adapt to future changes in the curriculum or educational policies. Moreover, the classroom instruction is conducted offline or face to face interaction which result in a lack of confidence. Teachers in SDN 2 Mengwi also reveal that they feel less competent and unsure of their ability to effectively teach English back in class.

Although there are no clear criteria yet of which level of proficiency that an English teacher should possess(Farhan et al., 2022; Van Canh & Renandya, 2017), If it is referred to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) teachers are actually expected to be in the level of proficient users (C1) (Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021; Van Canh & Renandya, 2017) . The description of can-do level of C1 that is related to teaching can be seen as follows:

Table 1. C1 Can do level in CEFR descriptors for oral production

Level	Scale	Descriptor
C1	Overall production	Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.
	Describing Experience	Can give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding them off with an appropriate conclusion.
	Giving information	Can communicate clearly detailed distinctions between ideas, concepts and things that closely resemble one other.
	Making Announcement	Can deliver announcements fluently, almost effortlessly, using stress and intonation to convey finer shades of meaning precisely.

Addressing Audiences	Can handle interjections well, responding spontaneously and almost effortlessly.

Looking at the descriptors presented above and the result of preliminary study, it is undeniably arduous to achieve the C1 level for primary school teachers. However, with the absence of English teaching, it is important to take a deeper look to the phenomena of teacher proficiency level as well as how they transform it into classroom language when it comes to offline learning. To this end, the following research questions are posed:
1. What is the proficiency level of the English teacher of SDN 2 Mengwi?
2. What are the classroom language features mostly used by the English teacher of SDN 2 Mengwi?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Comprehensible Input
The term comprehensible input is primarily associated with Krashen's second language acquisition theory (1982) who developed this theory as part of his input hypothesis (Venditti, 2021). Krashen argues that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to meaningful and understandable input. According to his hypothesis, comprehensible input is essential for language acquisition, and it should be delivered slightly above the learners' current level of proficiency to promote linguistic development (Moran, 2022).
According to this theory, once learners are exposed to comprehensible input, their internal language acquisition is activated and they subconsciously extract the pattern of a language (Patrick, 2019). This process is considered to be different from conscious learning that highlights the grammar rules explicitly and requires conscious effort to produce correct language forms. In order for an input to be comprehensible it should be delivered in a context that foster learning, referred to a real world problem, and involve meaning communication(Liu, 2013; Rijoly, 2017). Most importantly, the language should be adjusted to the learners' level by simplifying the language, using gestures, and any other means to make the input more accessible.

Influenced by this theory, the focus of language teaching has gradually shifted from the question of how to teach into how to make them learn. A number of studies have tried to proof the impact of the application of comprehensible input theory into teaching and learning from both teachers and students' perspective. A study from Linh (2022) for instance, he focuses his study into looking at teachers' perspective of the use of comprehensible input in vocabulary teaching. This study reveals that the implementation of the comprehensible input theory is in very good category. Teachers put much value on this theory as they experience teaching to various students' level. Another study from Rodrigo et al. (2004) highlight that interaction must also be valued in the application of this principle. In that way learners will shift from fully assisted by comprehensible input to self-selected materials that is a milestone to be self-directed learners. The use of comprehensible input, with all of its contribution to direct learning, should be adjusted in every classroom situation which makes this term further known as classroom language.

Classroom Language

In a classroom situation, teachers are always faced with numbers of options of how they will interact with their students. They surely have tendency to use their first language since it is considered easier and a shortcut to provide understanding (Apriliani & Lengkanawati, 2023). However, the real issue is how to maximize the use of the target language as an exposure to the learners in form of series of expressions. Classroom language literally deals with expression used in interactions between teachers and students in an educational setting. The use of classroom language aims to facilitate students' expression in their interaction, especially in English. In addition, employing classroom language is to assist students in fully comprehending the language and applying it in real-life communication. Therefore, the role of teachers in this respect is essential to engage students in active communication.

Aside from facilitating the engagement in the learning process, the use of classroom language also plays a vital role as language models for the learners. By using accurate and appropriate language in the classroom, teachers demonstrate correct pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse pattern. In this regard, learners are provided with authentic and contextualized examples.

This study investigated the classroom language types as utilized by Hadiatmi et al (2020) consisted of the instructional talk and management talk. Instructional talk refers to the language and communication used by teachers to deliver content materials, ask questions, direct students to a discussion, as well as giving feedback. The use of instructional talk often varies in its formality, complexity, and level of interaction depending on the instructional context, the age of the learners, and the proficiency level of both teacher and learners. The use of instructional talk could be both planned and spontaneous speech as teachers need to adjust their language use to the learning objective and student needs.

In the same manner, management talk in the classroom is conducted to effectively manage and maintain the organization, production, and supportive learning environment. Teachers generally produce specific utterances and instructions to promote or redirect positive behavior and indicate transitions of learning process. As for the first objective, it is a common occasion to find that when students engage in an off-task behavior, teachers need to calmly and assertively addressing the expected behavior, reminding learners to the classroom rules, as well as feedback to the students' behavior. Secondly, during the transition of classroom activities, management talk assists students to shift their focus and move from one task to another. In short, management talk deals with directing students attention to produce expected behavior so that the classroom instruction could run smoothly.

The point of observation regarding the instructional talk and management talk employed in this study is provided as follows:

Table 2. Classroom Language Types

No.	Types of Classroom Language	Utilization
1.	Instructional Talk	Explaining
		Asking questions
		Directing students
		Providing feedback
2	Management Talk	Giving Instruction
		Greetings

		Checking Attendance
		Making Humor
		Praising
		Giving answer
		Modelling activities and giving students' chance to think

METHOD

This study was conducted in SDN 2 Mengwi, Bali, where English proficiency has become an issue due to the change of curriculum. Preliminary study indicated that the teacher felt less competent in start teaching with the new curriculum after two years of lack of use of the target language which may result in language attrition. Therefore, the researcher began by drawing the attention to one teacher who was being interviewed. In other words, the teacher is purposefully selected.

In order to assess the teacher English proficiency as well as the classroom language used, the researchers employ both interview and video-recorded observation. All results from the observation and interview are transcribed for the data analysis. The interview is done as means to assess the teacher speaking proficiency since there many occasions where teachers are reluctant to be tested in formal situation because teachers do not want to be judged. Likewise, the preliminary interview showed that the teacher did not think that there will be continuation after the test in terms of using it as a basis to continuous professional development. This is in line with Berliner (2005) and Angrist and Guryan (2008) argument that teachers mostly defy standardized testing since they argue that the content of the standardized test is not always usable in teaching. That being said, the interview was conducted in English where the recording of the interview was then rated by two raters to decide to which level the teacher was. Similarly, the transcription from the observation during the instructional process will be deeply analyzed to determine the distribution of classroom language used by the teacher. The data from the observation of teaching and learning process are presented in frequencies from two episodic teaching.

FINDINGS

There are two observing times in face-to-face classroom interaction and one speaking proficiency assessment to the teacher. The interview is done by asking teacher several questions starting from general ones such as personal background to specific questions in relation to teaching conduct. In this respect, the teacher was voluntarily speaking in English to be assessed. Based on the result of the assessment of the speaking proficiency, it is concluded that the teacher is in the level of A2+ based referring to the CEFR proficiency level. The competencies that the teacher perform is as follows:

Table 3. The Teacher Speaking Proficiency

Level	Scale	Descriptor
A2+	Overall production	Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines. likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list. Can generally understand clear, standard

		speech/sign on familiar matters directed at them, provided they can ask for repetition or reformulation from time to time.
	Describing Experience	Can describe everyday aspects of their environment e.g. people, places, a job or study experience. Can describe their family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job.
	Giving information	Can explain what they like or dislike about something, why they prefer one thing to another, making simple, direct comparisons.
	Making Announcement	Can deliver very short, rehearsed announcements of predictable, learnt content which are intelligible to recipients who are prepared to concentrate.
	Addressing Audiences	Can cope with a limited number of straightforward follow-up questions.

From the table 3 above, it can be seen that the teacher being interviewed does not have a problem in answering general questions like her daily routines and describing about the working environment. However, most of the answer was in the form of simple phrases and sentences, yet the teacher was unable to elaborate the description. The teacher also occasionally asks for repetition of the questions indicating the limitation of vocabulary which result in reformulation of the question. The reformulation can be seen in the following excerption:

A: What do you do to promote active participation and interaction among students in English language activities?
T: You mean how to make them active?
A: Yes
T: If they passive, I give more and more questions until they start answer my question.

The parts of interview presented above is the indication of the inability of the teacher to comprehend the gist of the utterance which led to asking for repetition and reformulation of the question. By engaging this process, the teacher was able to produce more utterance in correspond to the core of the question. Further, the teacher is also able to construct a simple comparison when the researchers asked about which one that she likes more, teaching primary school students or adolescence and the response was that she likes teaching children more. Evidently, the teacher responds spontaneous follow up questions accordingly and acceptably.

In a different light, based on the data collected through the observation during classroom interaction, the researchers highlight that both instructional and management talk are almost evenly distributed. Based on the number utterances counted, the researcher noted that the use of L1 is slightly higher than English. The frequency of teacher utterances is provided as follows:

Table 4. Frequency of Teacher Utterances

No	Languages	Teacher Utterances				Total	
		Instructional		Management			
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Indonesian (L1)	64	25.6	77	30.8	141	56.4
2	English (L2)	53	21.2	46	18.4	99	39.6
3	Balinese	3	1.2	7	2.8	10	4

From table 4, it can be seen that the general findings on the use of classroom language in this study is still dominated by the use of L1 as medium of interaction in the classroom with 56.4%. On the other hand, the use of English as medium of interaction occurs 39.6%. The teacher in this case also uses the vernacular or local language occasionally with 4%. The use of English as medium of interaction predominantly transpires as instructional talk with 21.2%. In contrast, the use of L1 is primarily used in management talk with 30.8%. The researchers also further discover that the instructional talk is used in the context of explaining, asking questions, directing students, and giving feedbacks. The distribution of the use of instructional talk is provided in the following table.

Table 5. Frequency of Instructional Talk

No	Instructional Talk	Frequency	%
1	Explaining	63	52.5
2	Asking questions	28	23.3
3	Directing students	21	17.5
4	Providing feedback	8	6.7
Total		120	100

Table 5 displays the details of instructional talk in the classroom categorized into four main types: explaining, asking questions, directing students, and providing feedback. The most frequent form of instructional talk identified was explaining with 52.5% f the total observed utterances. That indicates a significant portion of classroom discourse was directed to provide explanations to students that covers conveying information and lesson topic. Asking questions comprised the second most common type of instructional talk, representing 23.3% of the observed utterances. This highlights the teacher's effort to stimulate thinking, assess comprehension, and promote participation in the classroom. The effort to engage students can also be seen from 17.5% of the instructional talk are used to direct students in an active discussion. The least frequent form of instructional talk is providing feedback with 6.7%. This aspect includes offering evaluative comments, correction, and suggestions to students.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the management talk is conducted to direct students to perform the expected behavior. From the result of the analysis, it was found that the management talks is performed in ten different contect:

Table 6. Frequency on Teachers Management Talk

No	Management Talk	Frequency	%
1	Giving Instruction	63	48.5
2	Greetings	8	6,2
3	Checking Attendance	2	1.5
4	Making Humor	4	3,1
5	Praising	8	6,2
6	Giving answer	13	10
7	Modelling activities	32	24,5
Total		130	100

Table 6 presents the frequency of different types of management talk observed in the classroom setting. The most frequent type of management talk occurs is giving instruction with 48.5% from the total management talk observed. This indicates that a significant portion of the classroom language is dedicated to providing instruction to guide students' learning and behaviors. Greetings, on the other hand, constituted a smaller proportion with a frequency of 6.2%. This effort to maintain positive interaction with students only occur at the beginning of the session. Modelling the activities represents the second most frequent type of management talk with 24.5%. This act is necessary to provide a clear and visual representation of what is expected from students. Additionally, this effort helps students to observe step by step process while internalizing the instruction as their own knowledge.

DISCUSSION
Based on the findings of the use of classroom language, it is known that the classroom language is dominantly used for management talk with 52%, while the rest is used for instructional talk with 48%. In the instructional talk, explaining and questioning have the most prevailing number with 52.5% and 23.3% respectively. Meanwhile, the use of management talk is predominantly used for both giving instruction and modelling the activities with 48.5% and 24.5%.
The results of the analysis in general indicate that despite having limitation of language proficiency, the teacher is still able to perform exemplary since the teacher is putting forward the talk on fundamental parts of instructions which are managing the behavior of the learners while extending the modelling of the activities at the same time. Likewise, even in a condition of having predicaments on elaborating an explanation based on the assessment results, the teacher spends half of the instructional talk trying to explain and provide questions that lead students to think. The dilemma eventuates when the teacher tries to optimize the talk by switching the language over time from L2 to L1. In a way, constant translation can create too much dependency on the first language and hinder students'

ability to fully immerse themselves to the target language, yet the teacher feels there is an incomplete transfer of meaning when her talk in English is not responded accordingly.

If the findings are being examined further, teaching in this case is a continuous process involving personal growth in cultivating supportive environment to nurture the future of education (Zulfitri, 2020). The professional growth of a teacher lies on their ability to interact intensively in the classroom with the learners (Postholm, 2018). In the case of this study where the interaction occurs to explain and asking questions to students is already a good indication of a well teaching strategy. Young learners by nature are fast learners but unable to picture abstract concept (Aslamiah, 2022; Purnami, 2022). Therefore, an explanation of the materials by adjusting to students' level is essential to help ensure that students understand the subject matter being taught. Besides, a well-delivered explanation capture students' attention and engage them in the learning process. The core is to make them be aware of the significance of the materials.

Moreover, this study elicits that the teacher did not merely perform the explanation, but also helped by modelling the activities. As mentioned previously, young learners are unable to visualize abstract concepts. Thus, modelling the activities to assist the explanation provide learners with visual representation of the concepts or skills being taught. Further, modelling the activities serve as a powerful tool for skill acquisition. This happens once students observe teacher's demonstration and through repetition, they apply the knowledge for themselves. It is also necessary to add that modelling the activities accommodate students different learning style, pace, as well as level of proficiency. This differentiated approach ensures that all students receive the needed support from their teacher.

Other than the ability to explain and modelling, teacher's quality in questioning also serves as primary contributor in classroom language (Ekawati et al., 2021). Teacher needs to comprehend the questioning strategies since questions are not merely to be answered, rather it should engage students, stimulate thinking, be usable to assess understanding, foster critical thinking, and many others (Zulfikar et al., 2022). This study gains insight into the portion of questioning used by the teacher is already in the desirable amount though the quality of the questioning is still inconclusive. Nevertheless, the occurrence of questioning with desirable amount has indicated that the teacher being observed has done an effort to implement questioning strategies. This strategy involves consideration to refer to the Bloom's taxonomy in its implementation. From this perspective, teacher may mix the lower and higher-level questions to scaffold students' learning and assess their thinking at various cognitive levels. The low-level questions could be delivered by utilizing close ended form so that students have specific answer and response and vice versa. When it is possible, teacher may pose probing questions to follow up students' initial answer to encourage them to provide more in-depth explanations, elaborating their response as well as consider alternative perspective. If we refer to the finding about teacher's proficiency and the amount of questioning strategies involved, it is clear that the teacher has implemented the questioning strategies to certain extent.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of the study indicate that classroom language is predominantly used for management talk, comprising 52% of the overall language use, while instructional talk accounts for the remaining 48%. Explaining and questioning are the most prevalent types of instructional talk, with 52.5% and 23.3% respectively. The management talk primarily focuses on giving instructions and modeling activities, representing 48.5% and 24.5% of the total management talk. Despite language proficiency limitations, the teacher demonstrates exemplary performance by effectively managing student behavior and providing modeling activities during instructional talk.

However, a dilemma arises when the teacher switches between L2 and L1, attempting to optimize communication. Constant translation can create dependency on the first language, hindering students' full immersion in the target language. Yet, incomplete transfer of meaning occurs when the teacher's English talk is not responded to accordingly. Adjusting the level of explanation to suit students' comprehension abilities is crucial for effective learning, as young learners may struggle with abstract concepts. Furthermore, modeling activities provide visual representations and assist in skill acquisition, accommodating different learning styles and levels of proficiency among students.

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