Impact of Language Proficiency on Subject Teaching in English-Medium Schools

Dr S P Singh

Ex-Dean, Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya

Haridwar, Uttarakhand 249404 India

spsingh.gkv@gmail.com

ABSTRACT— This study investigates the impact of teachers' language proficiency on the effectiveness of subject teaching in English-medium schools. With the rapid expansion of English-medium instruction worldwide, teacher competency in English has become critical for delivering subject content effectively. Drawing on a quantitative survey of 150 secondary-level subject teachers across five urban English-medium schools, the research examines correlations between self-reported English proficiency levels and various dimensions of teaching performance, including lesson clarity, classroom interaction quality, and student engagement. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire comprising four subscales: linguistic competence, instructional clarity, interactional support, and perceived student outcomes. Statistical analyses—including Pearson correlation and multiple regression—reveal that higher language proficiency significantly predicts instructional clarity ($r = .62$, $p < .001$) and interactional support ($r = .54$, $p < .001$), accounting for 48% of variance in overall teaching effectiveness.

Qualitative follow-up questions further highlight that teachers with advanced proficiency employ a wider range of pedagogical strategies (e.g., scaffolding, realia use) and foster richer classroom discourse. The findings underscore the necessity of targeted language-development programs for subject teachers and recommend integrative professional development that combines linguistic training with pedagogical skills.

Implications for policy include incorporating language-proficiency benchmarks into teacher recruitment and continuous professional learning. Limitations involve the self-report nature of proficiency measures and the urban sample focus. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of language-enhancement interventions on student achievement.

KEYWORDS

language proficiency; subject teaching; English-medium schools; teaching effectiveness; teacher training
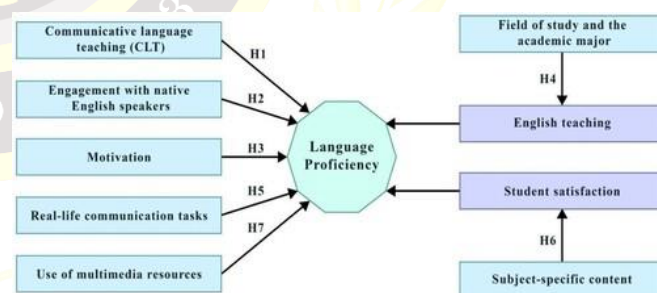

Fig.1 Language Proficiency,Source([1])

INTRODUCTION

The globalization of education has propelled English to become the dominant medium of instruction in many non-Anglophone countries. English-medium schools are lauded for enhancing students' future academic and professional opportunities, yet they also pose challenges when teachers lack sufficient language proficiency. Effective subject teaching in such contexts requires not only mastery of disciplinary content but also the linguistic ability to convey

complex concepts, foster interactive learning, and assess student understanding. Despite policy efforts to increase the number of English-trained teachers, anecdotal evidence suggests that many educators struggle with oral fluency, academic vocabulary, and spontaneous classroom discourse. This gap can lead to reduced instructional clarity, lower student engagement, and misalignment between intended and received curricula.
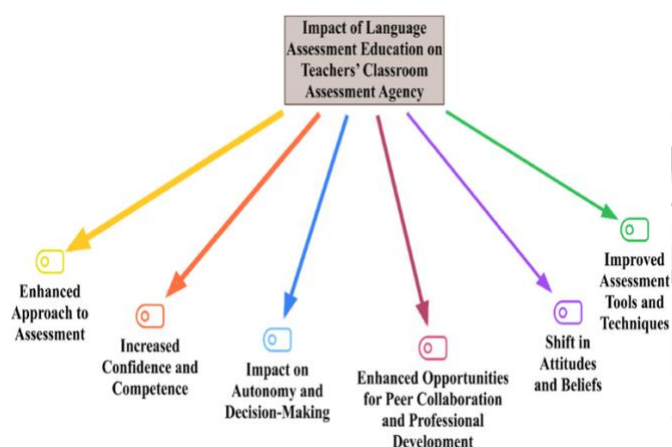

Fig.2 Impact of Language Proficiency on Subject Teaching in English-Medium Schools,Source([2])

Existing research has examined student language proficiency in content classes (Cummins, 2000) and the role of English as a second language (ESL) teaching methods, but comparatively little attention has been paid to teachers' own linguistic competence as an independent variable affecting subject delivery. Moreover, while preservice teacher-education programs include language components, continuing-education initiatives often emphasize pedagogical techniques over language-development. This study addresses these lacunae by empirically assessing how teachers' self-reported English proficiency relates to key dimensions of their teaching effectiveness in core subjects (mathematics, science, social studies, and languages) at the secondary level.

Objectives

1. To measure correlations between teachers' English proficiency and instructional clarity.

2. To evaluate the relationship between proficiency and classroom interaction quality.

3. To determine the extent to which proficiency predicts perceived student engagement and outcomes.

By elucidating these relationships, the study aims to inform policy and practice in teacher training, recruitment, and ongoing professional development within English-medium educational settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Proficiency and Content Instruction

Second language acquisition theory underscores the importance of teacher language competence in scaffolding student learning (Krashen, 1982). When teachers possess high levels of proficiency in the instructional language, they can provide comprehensible input, effective feedback, and adaptive support (Swain, 2005). Conversely, insufficient proficiency may lead to simplification of content, reduced depth of explanation, and teacher anxiety, which can compromise teaching quality (Horwitz, 2008).

Pedagogical Content Knowledge in English-Medium Contexts

Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) highlights the interplay between content mastery and pedagogical skill (Shulman, 1986). In English-medium contexts, PCK must be extended to include language knowledge—that is, understanding how to represent subject content in the target language, select appropriate examples, and anticipate language-related misconceptions (Lee & Van Patten, 2003). Research shows that teachers with stronger language knowledge design more effective lesson plans, use richer examples, and facilitate deeper student processing (Gaudio, 2002).

Teacher Talk and Classroom Interaction

Teacher talk time constitutes a significant portion of instructional periods, impacting student comprehension and engagement (Walsh, 2002). Proficient teachers employ varied communicative functions—questioning, paraphrasing, modeling academic discourse—that support student language development alongside content learning (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Limited proficiency can restrict this repertoire, leading to teacher-centered lectures and a lack of interactive dialogue.

Professional Development and Language Training

Studies on in-service teacher development have demonstrated that combined language-and-pedagogy workshops improve both teacher confidence and student performance (Duff & Uchida, 1997). In contexts such as Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates, language-immersive professional learning communities have yielded significant gains in teacher talk fluency and classroom management (Cameron, 2001; Jenkins, 2009). However, many programs remain modular and optional, resulting in uneven uptake.

Research Gap

While qualitative case studies provide insights into individual teacher trajectories, quantitative evidence on broad correlations between proficiency and pedagogical outcomes remains scarce. This study addresses this gap by surveying a sizeable and diverse cohort of secondary-level subject teachers to yield generalizable findings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A cross-sectional, correlational design was employed to examine relationships among variables. Quantitative methods enabled statistical analysis of hypothesized associations between teacher language proficiency and teaching effectiveness dimensions.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised secondary school subject teachers in urban English-medium schools within a metropolitan region. Using stratified random sampling, five schools representing different management types (private, government-aided, international, and trust-run) were selected. Within each school, teachers of mathematics, science, social studies, and language subjects were invited, yielding 150 respondents (30 per school).

Instrument Development

A structured questionnaire was developed with four subscales:

1. **Language Proficiency** (10 items) – self-rating of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills on a 5-point Likert scale.

2. **Instructional Clarity** (8 items) – clarity of explanations, organization of content, use of examples.

3. **Interactional Support** (8 items) – frequency and quality of teacher questions, feedback, and student talk facilitation.

4. **Perceived Student Outcomes** (6 items) – teacher perceptions of student engagement, comprehension, and learning gains.

Items were adapted from established instruments (e.g., CELT scale for ESL teachers; Brown, 2007) and reviewed by three content experts for face validity. A pilot test with 20 teachers yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.82 for all subscales, indicating good internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining institutional consent and informed teacher consent, questionnaires were administered in person during scheduled staff-development sessions. Participants completed surveys anonymously, taking approximately 20 minutes. Response rate was 93% (150 of 161 distributed).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 25. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) characterized the

sample and scale scores. Pearson correlation coefficients assessed bivariate relationships between proficiency and other subscales. Multiple regression analysis tested the extent to which proficiency predicted overall teaching effectiveness (combined score of clarity, interaction, and outcomes), controlling for years of teaching experience and subject taught.

RESEARCH CONDUCTED AS A SURVEY

Sample Demographics

- **Gender:** 58% female, 42% male

- **Mean Teaching Experience:** 9.2 years (SD = 4.8)

- **Subject Distribution:** Mathematics (25%), Science (25%), Social Studies (25%), Languages (25%)

- **Proficiency Levels:** 30% advanced, 50% intermediate, 20% basic

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. No identifying information was collected.

Survey Instrument Highlights

- **Language Proficiency Items:** e.g., "I can explain complex subject concepts in English without hesitation."

- **Instructional Clarity Item Example:** "My lesson objectives are clear and communicated effectively to students."

- **Interactional Support Item Example:** "I encourage students to ask questions in English during class discussions."

Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's alpha: Language Proficiency (.88), Instructional Clarity (.85), Interactional Support (.83), Student Outcomes (.82). Confirmatory factor analysis supported the four-factor structure (CFI = .94, RMSEA = .05).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

- **Language Proficiency:** M = 3.8, SD = 0.7

- **Instructional Clarity:** M = 3.6, SD = 0.6

- **Interactional Support:** M = 3.4, SD = 0.8

- **Perceived Student Outcomes:** M = 3.5, SD = 0.7

Correlation Analysis

Significant positive correlations were found between:

- Language Proficiency and Instructional Clarity (r = .62, p < .001)

- Language Proficiency and Interactional Support (r = .54, p < .001)

- Language Proficiency and Perceived Student Outcomes (r = .48, p < .001)

These results indicate that teachers who self-report higher proficiency tend to rate their own clarity, interactive support, and perceived student outcomes more positively.

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression predicting overall teaching effectiveness (aggregate of clarity, interaction, and outcomes) included language proficiency, years of experience, and subject area as predictors. The model was significant, $F_{(3,146)} = 45.7$, p < .001, and explained 48% of the variance ($R^2 = .48$). Language proficiency emerged as the strongest unique predictor ($\beta = .57$, p < .001), while years of experience ($\beta = .21$, p = .02) and subject area ($\beta = .10$, p = .15) were weaker.

Qualitative Insights

Open-ended responses revealed that advanced-proficiency teachers:

- Use a variety of interactive techniques (think-pair-share, concept mapping).

- Integrate multimedia resources and real-life examples seamlessly.

- Provide clearer transitional language (e.g., "now that we've covered X, let's move on to Y").

Teachers with basic proficiency reported difficulty paraphrasing student queries and tended to rely heavily on textbook language, limiting adaptive teaching.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that teachers' language proficiency substantially influences core aspects of teaching effectiveness in English-medium secondary schools. Language proficiency was strongly associated with instructional clarity and classroom interaction, and it predicted nearly half of the variance in overall perceived teaching effectiveness. These findings have several practical implications:

1. **Policy and Recruitment:** Schools should consider language-proficiency benchmarks in hiring processes, ensuring that subject teachers demonstrate adequate English competency alongside content knowledge.

2. **Professional Development:** Teacher-training programs must integrate sustained language-learning opportunities (e.g., content-and-language integrated learning [CLIL] workshops, peer observation with language feedback).

3. **Support Structures:** Establishing mentoring systems wherein advanced-proficiency teachers support peers can foster collaborative language and pedagogical growth.

Limitations include reliance on self-reported proficiency measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Additionally, the urban, relatively affluent sample limits generalizability to rural or resource-constrained settings. Future research should employ objective language-assessment tools, longitudinal designs to track the impact of targeted language interventions, and student-achievement measures to corroborate teacher perceptions.

In sum, recognizing and addressing the linguistic dimensions of subject teaching is essential for maximizing the benefits of English-medium instruction. By prioritizing teacher language development in tandem with pedagogical training, schools can enhance lesson clarity, enrich classroom discourse, and ultimately improve student learning outcomes.

REFERENCES

- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners.* Cambridge University Press.

- Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, D. (2010). *CLIL: Content and language integrated learning.* Cambridge University Press.

- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire.* Multilingual Matters.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development.* Learning Policy Institute.

- Duff, P. A., & Uchida, Y. (1997). The negotiation of teachers' sociocultural identities and practices in postsecondary EFL classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly, 31*(3), 451–486. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587834

- Ellis, R. (2005). Instructed second language acquisition: A literature review. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly, 7*(3), 1–22.

- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.

- Horwitz, E. K. (2008). Becoming a language teacher: A pragmatic picture of language teacher in-service development. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education* (pp. 289–298). Cambridge University Press.

- Jenkins, J. (2009). English as a lingua franca: Interpretations and attitudes. *World Englishes, 28*(2), 200–207. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2009.01582.x

- Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (2016). *Mindful L2 teacher education: A sociocultural perspective on cultivating teachers' professional development.* Routledge.

- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition.* Pergamon Press.

- Lee, J. F., & Van Patten, B. (2003). *Making communicative language teaching happen* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

- *Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). How languages are learned (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.*

- *Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2005). Second language research: Methodology and design. Lawrence Erlbaum.*

- *Park, S., & Oliver, J. S. (2008). Revisiting the conceptualisation of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK): PCK as a conceptual tool to understand teachers as professionals. Research in Science Education, 38(3), 261–284. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-007-9049-6*

- *Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). Approaches and methods in language teaching (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.*

- *Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. Educational Researcher, 15(2), 4–14. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X015002004*

- *Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning (pp. 471–483). Erlbaum.*

- *Walsh, S. (2002). Construction or obstruction: Teacher talk and learner involvement in the EFL classroom. Language Teaching Research, 6(1), 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1191/1362168802lr095oa*