Vietnamese EFL High School Teachers' Self-assessment of their English Language Proficiency in Relation to the Official Assessment Test Results

Van Hoang Le
Foreign Language Department, Binh Dinh College, Quy Nhon City Vietnam
e-mail: lehoangvan0908@gmail.com

Khoi Ngoc Mai (Correspondence)
University of Languages and International Studies,
Vietnam National University, Hanoi
e-mail: khoi.maingoc@gmail.com

Abstract
The current study explored how Vietnamese EFL high school teachers self-assessed their current English proficiency. It also compared teachers' self-ratings with the results they obtained in the Project 2010 test, which was used to assess English level of EFL teachers across Vietnam as part of the implementation of the National Foreign Language Project 2020. The data were drawn from 15-item online questionnaire with 94 teacher participants. The findings revealed that teachers perceived themselves as being more proficient in skills of writing and reading, compared to listening, spoken production (e.g., making presentations) and spoken interaction (e.g., making conversations). Most of them rated their current English proficiency level lower than the level they achieved in the Project 2020 test. The findings offer information about the language aspects that teachers were least proficient, which can be used to specify what support they actually desire from in-service training courses. Also, as teachers are at the centre of the Project 2020, their perceptions of their own English proficiency provide insightful input to enhance the effectiveness of this educational reform.
Keywords: Vietnamese EFL high school teachers, self-perceived English proficiency, Project 2020 test

1. INTRODUCTION

"Không thầy đố mày làm nên."

(Good knowledge is based on good teachers.)

Vietnamese children are brought up to believe in this idiom, which, in addition to building students' gratitude to their teachers, highlights the role of teachers in students' learning achievement. There is no exception with English language teachers. According to Huynh (2006), students' main exposure to English is in classrooms from teachers who provide instruction, models of English and feedback. It is understandable that teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Vietnam, just like teachers elsewhere, are expected to maintain a high level of English proficiency. However, when describing the reality of English proficiency development among Vietnamese EFL teachers, Le (2002) stated - "The longer language teachers stay in their job, the more disadvantaged they are in terms of language improvement" (p. 35). This statement becomes critical considering teachers' role as masters of knowledge according to Vietnamese values (Pham, 2007; Huynh, 2006) and the increasing concerns relating to their English proficiency in the country.

As an attempt to upgrade the teaching efficiency and, in turn, foster students' improvement, the National Foreign Language Project 2020 (the Project 2020) marks a turning point in English language education in Vietnam (NFL 2020 Forum, 2014). This project reflects the ascendancy of English as an international language for access to "research and development in all areas of scientific, technological and commercial endeavor" (Denham, 1992, p. 62) in the era of globalization. Vietnamese authorities, therefore, have considered English language as a tool for "regional integration and global participation" (Le, 2002, p.33). For the first time, English proficiency standards of EFL teachers of all teaching levels, from primary schools to tertiary institutions, were proposed in reference to the Common European Framework of References (CEFR). The framework divides English language proficiency into six levels, ranging from A1 as the lowest to C2 as the highest (Council of Europe, 2001).

In order to survey whether the current teaching staff meet the required level of English proficiency, more than 80,000 teachers across the country were assigned to take a proficiency test, known as the Project 2020 English proficiency test (Project 2020 test) (Parks, 2011). The test evaluates teachers' English proficiency in terms of speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. Top universities in Vietnam were chosen to be responsible for conducting a test for assessing teachers in certain neighboring provinces (Toan, 2013). Those universities were also responsible for providing training for teachers who have failed to achieve the required level. The same tests were applied to all teachers of the same teaching levels regardless of their different teaching circumstances, which is considered as unfair for those in remote areas (Parks, 2011).

When first conducted in 2012, the results of Project 2020 test, described as "shocking" showed that the majority of teachers failed to reach the expected English proficiency level (Le, 2015). The passing rate was far below expectation even in big cities which are considered to have the highest academic standards in the country (Parks, 2011). It should be noted that the Project 2020 test is not to dismiss teachers who fail to obtain the expected result; rather it has been used to investigate current level of English proficiency of teaching staff before 'unqualified' members are sent to training courses funded by the government. However, issues related to the Project 2020 test results have attracted a lot of attention from experts and the public. A lot of reasons have been released explaining for the unexpected results. However, not much has been heard from teacher participants who are suffering the most from the test results.

The current study aims at investigating how Vietnamese EFL high school teachers rated their English proficiency in relation to the CEFR. It also examines the possible relationships between teachers' self-rating and the proficiency level they achieved based on the results of Project 2020 test. The findings of the study hope to provide insights into how teachers perceived their English proficiency, from which aspects that teachers feel least proficient were revealed. Consequently, the findings are expected to provide teacher educators and policy makers input from the insiders to ensure the effectiveness of in-service training programs and the Project 2020.

1.1 English Language Teaching at High School Level in Vietnam

English language education has a proud history in Vietnam, where the society has witnessed rapid development and setback of other foreign languages such as French and Russian (Denham, 1992). In 1980s, English language was considered as a 'luxury subject', and therefore was only taught at few elite schools in Ho Chi Minh City (Le & Do, 2012). However, over the past 30 years, English has become the most popular foreign language in the country (Le, 2002). It has become a compulsory subject in all levels of education including high school. Since 2006-2007 school year, high school curriculum has been divided into three streams, including Basic, Natural sciences and Social sciences. In all three streams, English is a required subject. The new textbooks, designed by Vietnamese authors, are also implemented, in which English textbooks are divided into Advanced level and Basic level. Students are offered approximately 80 hours (Basic textbooks) and 105 hours (Advanced textbooks) of in-class instruction in a 37-week school year.

In Vietnam, high school years is a critical period for students before they take the national graduation and the entrance examinations to tertiary education, in which English a compulsory component. Grammar, reading and vocabulary are the focus of English tests in these exams. Moreover, how students perform in English subjects at high school also affect their choice of university to apply for. Some programs are only admittable to candidates with certain English level. It is understandable that teachers have to work under high pressure for effective lessons.

A four year Bachelor degree is a basic qualification for teachers to apply for positions at high schools. Before that, most teachers are trained and practice their teaching activities in circumstance of insufficient and old-fashioned facilities and materials (Le, 2002). Enhancing reading and writing skills is the focus of teaching due to the influence of Chinese Confucian philosophy which claims that knowledge is reflected in written texts (Le, 2015). Toan (2013) describes English teacher training in Vietnam as a process of training prospective teachers to be experts of grammar so that they manage to instruct their students to pass grammar-oriented exams. Also, teachers do not have much in-service training, especially those focusing on English language development (Le, 2015; Mai, 2015). The effectiveness and practical values of current training courses are questioned because trainers with little practical experience in real classrooms are in charge.

A number of policies have been proposed to support teachers' professional development with a hope of improving their teaching effectiveness. However, the majority of them focused on whether teachers have achieved appropriate qualifications (i.e., a four year Bachelor degree in English teaching), not their actual English proficiency (Baker, 2012). Despite praiseworthy changes, the curriculum of English education is still claimed to be overwhelming to both teachers and students. Additionally, as claimed by Le (2013), the expected English proficiency of most start-up high schoolchildren is just elementary or lower intermediate while the expected level is intermediate. This even makes the tasks of high school teacher more challenging. Furthermore, teachers in remote areas face with even more challenges due to an increasing gap concerning teaching facilities between provinces with different social and economic conditions (Le, 2015).

As noted previously, the issue of CEFR as a reference of English proficiency requirement of Vietnamese EFL teachers is intended to be a solution for the drawbacks of English teaching and learning situation at the moment. In reference to the CEFR, high school teachers are required to achieve a minimum level of C1. In order to investigate whether the current high school staff, teachers are required to take the Project 2020 test. As shown in the official reports of 42 out of 64 provinces in Vietnam, almost 90% of high school teachers were unable to achieve C1 level (Nguyen, 2014). The disappointing results received an unsurprisingly large amount of criticism from all stakeholders (e.g., educators, policy makers). The results were also referred as strong rationale for urgent concerns about English proficiency of Vietnamese EFL teachers, including those working at high schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Language Teachers' Target Language Proficiency

Although a definition of a qualified EFL teacher is not straightforward considering the complexity of contextual factors (Butler, 2004; Richards, 2010), teachers' target language proficiency always remains at the center of essential requirements (Andrews,

2002; Fischer, 2013; Richards, 2010; Richards et al., 2013; Shin, 2008; Smadi & Al-Ghazo, 2013; Tang, 2007). Language proficiency is defined as "knowledge, competence, and ability in the use of a language, irrespective of how, where, or under what conditions it has been acquired" (Backman, 1990, p.16). Andrews (2002) refers to target language proficiency as teachers' language awareness, which involves knowledge of syntax, vocabulary, pronunciation as well as their usages in the target language. According to Richards et al. (2013), EFL teachers' language proficiency is identical to their required subject knowledge while Barnes (2002) claims that target language proficiency is "a significant part of subject knowledge" (p. 199). Simplifying all terminologies, Richards (2010), considers target language proficiency of EFL teachers as the necessary language to teach effectively.

The literature has long acknowledged a strong relationship between teachers' target language competency and their pedagogical practices (Richards, Conway, Roskvist & Harvay, 2013). Language teachers are expected to obtain "a full mastery of skills of the language they teach" (Smadi & Al-Ghazo, 2013, p.230). In an EFL context, where exposure to English outside educational institutions is limited, language teachers are considered as the representatives of the language (Andrews, 2007; Best, 2014; Le, 2002; Nakata, 2010). According to Kim and Elder (2008), EFL teachers are the determinant source of English exposure of students, taking the primary responsibility for students' English improvement. Cheng and Wang (2004) stress that a high level of the target language proficiency is crucial for EFL teachers in order to perform their most important professional tasks of developing their students' language proficiency.

Teachers with high proficiency of English are able to provide a wide range of teaching techniques, learning materials and meaningful practices to students more efficiently than teachers with lower proficiency (Tsui, 2002; McNamara, 1991; Richards et al., 2013; Tang, 2007). English proficiency determines the level of teachers' expertise in providing accurate feedback and responses to students' questions (Richards et al., 2013; Tsui, 2003), maintaining students' motivation and class attendance (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008). In their observations, Richards et al. (2013) found that teachers with limited proficient English showed inconsistency when providing explanation of structures and vocabulary and depended on a limited number of techniques to deliver their lessons and correct students' errors. Sešek's (2007) investigation into English language needs of 93 EFL teachers in Slovenia revealed that participants with low English proficiency were unable to identify students' errors resulting in embarrassing situations where they praised students' incorrect use of some structures.

With regard to the importance of English proficiency in teachers' academic practices, a number of researchers have reported that teachers' professional confidence is determined by their English proficiency. For example, Murdoch (1994) claims that for foreign language teachers, target language proficiency always "represents the bedrock of their professional confidence" (p.254). Teachers with limited language proficiency

"lack authority and self-confidence" when interacting with their students (Cullen, 2001, p.29). By contrast, teachers with high English proficiency appeared to be more confident in communicating with their students and in classroom management (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Ghasemboland & Hashim, 2013; Tang 2007). Nakata (2010) pinpoints a positive correlation between teachers' command of English and their capacity of assessing their colleagues' teaching performance, which contributes to their prestige in the staff.

It can be seen from the studies introduced above that a good command of target language proficiency facilitates the process of lesson delivery and offers teachers numerous advantages in other academic practices, and ultimately their career development. Another issue born out of past studies is the limitations relating to target language proficiency of current teaching staff of various contexts, which should be investigated before resolutions would be suggested.

2.2 Language Teachers' Self-assessment of their English Proficiency

Motivated by the growing concerns about teachers' target language proficiency by all related stakeholders (e.g., educators, employers), the assessment of teachers' language proficiency has become a research agenda (Andrews, 2010). As acknowledged in the literature related to language teaching, teachers' perceptions have a great influence on their actual teaching practices (Ghasemboland & Hashim, 2013) and, therefore, affect their students' improvement (Johnson, 1992). An investigation into teachers' beliefs provide evidence for predictions related to teachers' practices (Ghasemboland & Hashim, 2013) and their enthusiasm in English language development (Butler, 2004). Also, exploring teachers' limitations in their target language proficiency is the most practical way to explore their urgent needs for teaching career. However, to date there are few studies on the beliefs about their English language proficiency of non-native speaking teachers (Best, 2014).

Butler (2004) conducted an international study in which participants came from Taiwan, Japan and Korea. The participants were invited to rate their English proficiency according to six levels in seven language domains including listening, reading, writing, pronunciation, oral grammar, oral vocabulary and oral fluency. The findings revealed that most of participants perceived themselves as more proficient in receptive skills (i.e., listening, reading) than productive skills (i.e., speaking, writing). Also, they believed that their current English proficiency was lower than the level they desired for effective teaching practices. Replicating Butler's (2004) study, Best (2014) reported similar findings that Thai primary participants were more confident in listening and reading than in speaking and writing. The results also showed that teachers' perceptions on their English proficiency affects their confidence in their teaching activities (e.g., choice of materials and instructional strategies).

Ghasemboland and Hashim (2013) investigated teachers' perceived English proficiency at private schools in a Middle-Eastern country. Teachers rated themselves on 21 aspects

of English proficiency using a 6-point scale (1-Strongly disagree, 6-Strongly agree). The results are contradictory to those of Butler (2004) and Best (2014), in which teachers were more confident in productive skills than receptive skills. Nevertheless, the findings showed a positive correlation between their perceived English proficiency and their confidence in teaching English, which supports the findings of Butler (2004) and Best (2014).

It is well evidenced that there has been a gap between teachers' written skills and oral skills. Chacón (2005) investigated the self-ratings of 100 Venezuelan EFL teachers in 16 aspects relating to English proficiency. The findings showed that teachers considered themselves to be more proficient in written skills (i.e., reading and writing) than oral skills (i.e., listening and speaking). Dodgson Bt Tariq & Alauyah Md. Yusof (2016) found that there were positive reactions and comments which indicated that the use of the English Language learning websites has been successful in assisting the participants in dealing with indirect corrective feedback and in doing self-correction.

Tang (2007) investigated 53 Chinese EFL teachers' perceived English proficiency according to 6 proficient levels and seven skills including listening, grammar, reading, speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary and writing. The findings showed that teachers were more confident in written domains (e.g, reading, grammar skills) than oral skills (e.g., listening, speaking). Teachers required more in-service training and more emphasis in oral tests in examinations so that their communication would be fostered in classrooms. Teachers acknowledged that self-studying was the most effective way to maintain and develop their English proficiency. They applied a wide range of activities including media-oriented and traditional activities. Conducted in Vietnamese context, Khoi (2015) study focused on primary and secondary school teachers in Northern Vietnam. The findings are consistent to those of Chacón (2005) and Tang (2007) showing that the participants perceived themselves as most proficient in reading skill, followed by writing, spoken production (e.g., making presentation), spoken interaction (e.g., making conversation) and listening.

In summary, teachers' ratings of their English proficiency are different in different contexts. In the above studies, teacher participants were required to either rate their English language skills based on ordered levels (see Mai, 2015) or rate their proficiency level in various language aspects (see Chacon, 2005). The yielded findings highlight the importance of English proficiency to teaching practices and teachers' professional development.

2.3 Research Questions

This study was conducted in the basic of the two research questions (RQ):

RQ1   : How do Vietnamese EFL teachers rate their English proficiency levels, based on the CEFR?

RQ2   : What are the relationships between their perceived English proficiency level (PEP) and the level reflected in the Project 2020 test results (TEP)?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The participants were recruited from high schools in 20 provinces in Southern Vietnam. The information sheet and consent form were provided via email and Facebook messages in Vietnamese and English. After three weeks of distribution, 94 teachers, aged from 24 to 48, expressed an interest in participating in the study. Table 1 summarizes teachers' background information according to their English proficiency level based on the results of the Project 2020 test.

Table 1: *Participants' Background Information according to TEP (N = 94)*

TEP	Gender		Qualification		Total
	Male	**Female**	**BA**	**MA**	
B1	1	9	8	2	10
B2	2	25	19	8	27
C1	6	51	39	18	57
Total	9	85	66	28	94

Of 94 participants, ninety (96%) were female. This reflects the gender imbalance within the teaching workforce in most of English teaching staff in Vietnam, of whom more than 90 % are female (Le, 2015). Twenty-seven participants (29%) achieved Master degrees while the remainder (91%) obtained a Bachelor degree. When asked about their results in the Project 2020 test, 56 of them (60%) achieved C1 level, which is the required level set by the MOET for Vietnamese EFL high school teachers. Eleven participants only managed to obtain B1 level, which is rather lower than required standard.

The data on participants' teaching experience and workload in the school year 2014-2015 are further displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants' Teaching Experience and 2014-2015 Workload per Week (N = 94)

	Min	**Max**	*M*	*SD*
Teaching experience (yrs.)	2.00	20	8.04	5.10
Workload per week	8.00	40	16.37	4.34

Concerning their teaching load in the school year 2014-2015, teachers reported average teaching hours of 16.37 per week, which appears to reflect the required number of 17 teaching hours per week assigned by the MOET. However, participants' teaching hours

varied, ranging from 8 to 40 hours per week. Similarly, Table 2 demonstrated a wide range of teaching experience among the participants, ranging from 2 to 20 years.

3.2 Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using an online questionnaire designed in Google forms. There are two versions (Vietnamese and English) for participants to choose. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items divided into three sections as summarized in Table 3

Table 3: Content of the Questionnaire

Sections	Question Items	Data Collected	Types of Questions
Section 2: Perceived English proficiency	1-5	Perceived English proficiency in 5 skills	6-likert scales
Section 2: Background information	6-15	Ages, gender, teaching experience , highest qualification, studying abroad experience, TEP	Multiple choice, open ended

The first section (items 1-5) collected data exploring teachers' self-assessment of their language proficiency. The items in this section were taken from the questionnaire of Mai (2014, 2015). English proficiency was divided into six levels according to the CEFR, which has been used by the MOET as the standard for evaluating current English proficiency levels of teaching staff across Vietnam since 2012. As previously explained, high school teachers are expected to have achieved C1, which is equivalent to level 5 in the proficiency scale.

The second section (items 6-15) elicited the participants' background information (e.g., age, highest qualification, teaching experience). Item 7 collected the Project 2020 test results of participants, which, in combination with data on self-rated English proficiency, helped address RQ2.

A Cronbach's Alpha tests were performed to measure internal consistency of question items which produced the values of .896. These values indicated that the questionnaire was reliable given that Cronbach's Alpha values higher than or equal to .70 are acceptable (Field, 2009).

3.3 Data Analysis

Before the data were analyzed, responses to the closed questionnaire items were assigned codes. This was an on-going process starting when the first responses were retrieved. The numerical data including PEP, age, years of experience, teaching hours per week were presented as they were. Other data were coded in numbers using IF

formula with multiple conditions in Excel before being exported into SPSS for data analysis.

In order to answer RQ1 (How do Vietnamese EFL teachers rate their English proficiency levels, based on the CEFR?), the means and standard deviations of teachers' self-rated language proficiency level in each skill were calculated. Based on the outcomes, teachers' most and least proficient English language skills were detected.

As for RQ2 (What are the relationships between their perceived English proficiency level (PEP) and the level reflected in the Project 2020 test results (TEP)?), the overall PEP was calculated by counting the average of the five skills. For example, if a participant rated his/her English proficiency according to skills as 3.5 in listening, 4.0 in reading, 3.5 in spoken interaction, 5.0 in spoken production and 4.5 in writing, the corresponding overall PEP would be 4.1. Before choosing an appropriate statistical test for PEP and TEP comparison, the normality of data distribution was checked. The results of Shapiro-Wilk tests showed that the data on teachers' overall perceived English proficiency and the Project 2020 test results were not normally distributed (overall PEP: $W(94) = .97$, $p = .001$ and TEP: $W(94) = .70$, $p = .000$). Therefore, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was chosen to investigate the possible discrepancies between PEP and TEP. Furthermore, for each participant, the overall PEP was compared with their TEP. The outcomes were classified into three groups named "Overall PEP < TEP", "Overall PEP = TEP" and "Overall PEP > TEP".

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Perceived English Proficiency (PEP)

The first research question examined how teachers rated their English proficiency according to the five skills including listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. For each of the skills, the proficiency is divided into six levels from 1 (the lowest) to 6 (the highest).The descriptive statistics of teachers' self-assessment of their English proficiency in the five language skills are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics of Participants' PEP according to Skills (N=94)*

	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
Listening	2.00	6.00	3.67	.81
Reading	3.00	5.50	4.12	.61
Spoken Interaction	2.00	5.50	3.92	.90
Spoken production	2.00	6.00	4.03	.88
Writing	2.00	6.00	4.40	.82

Teachers perceived themselves as being most proficient in writing, followed by reading, spoken production and spoken interaction. The least proficient skill as rated was

listening. The low standard deviation of reading, compared to other skills, indicates that the majority of teachers considered their reading as the most competent skill.

The findings reflect the English teaching and learning situation in Vietnam, which puts a heavy focus on grammar, reading and writing (Le; 2015; Pham, 2007; Toan, 2013). Although communicative language teaching (CLT) is widely recommended in curriculum guidelines, various factors including a lack of facilities, students' low English level and teacher competency limit the application and effectiveness of this methodology in real teaching practices (Le & Barnard, 2009). This is also because English was initially introduced to Vietnamese students as a subject to pass, rather than a language for communication (Le, 2015). Most English tests in Vietnam are grammar-based, in which speaking and listening, if included, account for only a small percentage within the total assessment scores. The English tests of the two important examinations of high school students (i.e., the national graduation and the university entrance examinations) do not include speaking and listening. Consequently, it is understandable that listening and speaking are usually ignored in EFL classes, which reduces teachers' initiatives to improve these two skills as part of their teaching requirement. Additionally, in an EFL context, like students, teachers have limited exposure to English outside of institutional settings. Their lack of opportunities to frequently engage in English conversations might affect their confidence in oral skills. The fact that written skills are still the priority in teaching and learning is hard to change due to the long-term influence of Chinese Confucian philosophy, which highlights written texts as the roots of knowledge (Le, 2015; Tran, 2013).

Concerning the two categories of speaking, teachers rated themselves as more proficient in spoken production than spoken interaction. This is, perhaps, another evidence of teacher-centeredness in Vietnamese EFL classes. Teachers dominate the class by lecturing rather than interacting with their students when explaining language points. Influenced by "the basic Vietnamese cultural and educational values" (Pham, 2007, p. 336), in which teachers are considered as the masters of knowledge, many teachers maintain the habit of explicitly presenting their knowledge to quietly listening students. As a result, teachers become more confident in their spoken production skill through delivering lectures, compared to spoken interaction.

The results of participants' self-assessment of their English proficiency are similar to those reported in earlier studies conducted by Chacón (2002), Tang (2007) and Mai (2015), who found that their EFL teacher participants were more confident in written language domains than oral domains. While Mai (2015), also in Vietnamese context, found that his primary and secondary school teachers rated reading as their most proficient skill, followed by writing, in the current study, the order was reverse (i.e., more confident in writing than reading). A possible explanation is that EFL high school teachers obtained more exposure to complex writing genres in order to instruct their students. Therefore, they were more confident in their writing skill, compared to primary and secondary school teachers. Furthermore, the findings in the current study

are contrary to those of Butler (2004) and Best (2014). In those studies, participants from Taiwan, Japan and Korean perceived listening as their most proficient skill and writing as the weakest. Although it is too early to make a conclusion from this single study, the finding that Vietnamese teachers were less confident in listening and speaking than teachers in Taiwan, Japan and Korean might be the corollary of so many years focusing on just writing and reading in English teaching in Vietnam.

4.2 Overall Perceived English Proficiency vs Scores of the Project 2020 Test

The second research question examined possible relationships between participants' self-assessment of their overall English proficiency (overall PEP) and the level they achieved based on the results of the Project 2020 test (TEP). Participants' overall PEP was calculated by counting the average values of the five language skills.

Table 5: *Descriptive Statistics of Overall PEP and TEP (N=94)*

	Min	**Max**	*M*	*SD*
Overall PEP	2.60	5.20	4.05	.64
TEP	3.00	5.00	4.48	.70

As can be seen from Table 5, teachers' self-rated English proficiency is lower than their proficiency indicated in the Project 2020 test result. Since the data were not normally distributed, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was performed showing that the differences between participants' overall PEP and TEP were statistically significant, $Z = - 4.544$, $p =.000$. Table 6 provides further details of relationships between overall PEP and TEP in relation to participants' Project 2020 test results (i.e., B1, B2 and C1).

Table 6: *A Comparison between Overall PEP and TEP*

TEP	Overall PEP > TEP	Overall PEP=TEP	Overall PEP<TEP	Total
B1	8	1	1	10
B2	15	0	12	27
C1	6	2	49	57
Total	30	3	61	94

Among the 94 participants, almost two-thirds of them (N=61) rated their English proficiency lower than the scores they achieved from the Project 2020 test. Nearly one-third of participants (N=30) rated their English proficiency higher than their TEP. Three had their PEP similar to their TEP. In addition, out of the 57 participants who had obtained the mandated level of C1, 49 participants perceived their current English proficiency as lower than the achieved level of C1. In contrast, eight out of 10 participants who only managed to obtain level B1 from the Project 2020 test believed that their actual English proficiency was higher than B1 level.

Mismatches between teachers' perceived English proficiency and the achieved level from the Project 2020 test are understandable. In the survey, teachers referred to their overall English proficiency while the test somehow only managed to reflect teachers' capacity at a point in time. Furthermore, some cultural oriented factors might have been an underlying reason why teachers appeared to be humble when evaluating their own English proficiency. According to Le (2015), there is an increasing gap in terms of English teaching and learning facilities among the areas with different social and economic conditions. It can therefore be argued that teachers working in less developed areas are disadvantaged relative to teachers in big cities when they took the same test. Le (2015) claimed that participants of the Project 2020 test might be disadvantaged when receiving inadequate preparation for the new test design and rated by examiners with insufficient training in testing and assessment. Consequently, it could be the case that teachers of level B1 considered themselves as more proficient than the level demonstrated in the Project 2002 test results. Furthermore, the discrepancies between teachers' self-rated English proficiency and their English proficiency shown in the Project 2020 test results can reasonably raise doubts about the reliability of the test. There is a possibility that the test fails to reflect the current level of English proficiency of test takers. In addition, the fact that an overwhelming number of participants (N=61) rated themselves as having a proficiency level lower than the achieved level should be taken into consideration concerning the effectiveness of the Project 2020 test. It should be acknowledged that many Vietnamese EFL learners manage to pass English proficiency tests but have difficulties using English in communication (Thanhnien news, 2015). It is reasonable to question whether the results of some teachers, who used to be successful students, show their actual communicative competence.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the self-assessment and maintenance of the English proficiency among 94 Vietnamese EFL teachers. Additionally, it explored possible relationships between the participants' perceived English proficiency and the results of the Project 2020 test. Regarding RQ1 on teachers' self-assessment of their English proficiency according to five skills, the teachers perceived them as most proficient in writing, followed by reading, spoken production, spoken interaction and listening. The explanation of these findings resides in the reality of Vietnamese English education with a strong emphasis on written skills necessary for grammar-based exams.In reference to RQ2 on relationships between participants' overall PEP and TEP, more than two-thirds of them rated themselves lower than the level they managed to achieve in the Project 2020 test. These mismatches were explained in terms of contextual factors (e.g., lack of test preparation) and the quality of the test as a true reflection of the actual English proficiency of test takers.

5.1 Pedagogical Implementations

The participants' diffidence in their oral skills should be taken into consideration for the long-term improvement of English teaching and learning in Vietnam. According to Chacon (2002) and Sato and Kleinsasser (1999), teachers have a tendency to focus on language aspects that they were most confident in. As shown in the results, teachers were less confident with their oral skills, compared to their written skills. This might result in their heavy focus on grammar and written skills in teaching practices. Consequently, the implementation of CLT cannot be promoted, which affects English communication ability of students. Therefore, the provision of more training on English proficiency, with an emphasis on oral skills will be a potential solution for the failure in implementing CLT in Vietnamese contexts, which were repeatedly reported in Hiep (2000), Le (2002), Le and Barnard (2009) and Nguyen (2002).

The finding that teachers' self-ratings of their English proficiency is lower than the project 2020 test results shows that test results should not be the only reference to define whether a teacher is qualified enough for their position or not. How they judged their current proficiency should be counted. Passing the test might help them to retain their teaching position, this however does not mean that they are confident in their current English proficiency. The Project 2020 test is successful in raising awareness of teachers in improving their English proficiency, which used to be taken for granted. However, on-going support from the relevant authorities is still necessary for their target language maintenance and development. It is also important that the content of training reflects aspects in which teachers show weaknesses.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of this study open new directions for further research. The study could be replicated with different teacher groups. Additionally, the results of this study revealed a gap between teachers' perceived English proficiency and their level according to the Project 2020 test results. Among possible reasons for the mismatch, the quality of the test should be considered with an aim of improving its quality rather than criticising it. An investigation on the quality of the test might be achieved by exploring the views of the test takers or analysing the test design and test items. These investigations should be conducted the light of literature on English language tests for specific purposes.

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