

Assessing speaking proficiency of English teachers through self-assessment test: East Wollega zone in focus

Girma Abate Baisa^{1*}, Rufael Disasa Worabu², Teshale Tefera Belachew³

Department of English Language and Literature, College Institute of Languages Study and Journalism, Wollega University, Ethiopia

*) Corresponding Author, email: baisagirma@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study addresses the significant role of English speaking proficiency in the teaching-learning process, particularly considering the questionable speaking abilities of English teachers. The research aims to assess the speaking proficiency of English teachers in the East Wollega Zone. Employing a convergent parallel mixed design, blending quantitative and qualitative data methods, self-assessment tests, and classroom observations were utilized for data collection, and 101 participants for self-assessment and 15 respondents for classroom observations were selected using simple random sampling method. Findings indicate a prevalent trend of low speaking proficiency among English teachers, supported by both self-assessment data (mean= 2.3, standard deviation= 0.62) and classroom observation records. While gender did not significantly influence self-assessment scores, significant differences were noted among education qualification levels and teaching experience groups. Multiple regression analysis revealed a moderate association ($R^2 = 44.1\%$) between independent and dependent variables. The study concludes with implications underscoring the urgent need to enhance English teachers' speaking competency, particularly in first-cycle primary schools in the East Wollega Zone, emphasizing the potential to elevate the quality of the teaching-learning process and improve students' language acquisition and overall educational outcomes.

Keywords: English teachers; self-assessment; speaking proficiency

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking, a multifaceted skill encompasses grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Asdar, 2017; Khabbazzashi, 2017). Grammar, foundational to speech, offers insights into language structure and function (Underwood, 2017). Pronunciation, crucial for articulating sounds, necessitates a teacher's attention to clarity and comprehension (Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2019), while also being tailored to the proficiency levels of learners. Similarly, vocabulary, vital for effective communication, plays a significant role in aiding second language learners' success through

memorization (Goral & Bailey, 2019). Speaking integrates these skills, emphasizing accuracy, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and vocabulary (Asdar, 2017).

Speaking proficiency assessment is notoriously complex due to its multifaceted nature. Traditional methods such as interviews or oral tests provide valuable insights but may not capture the full range of speaking abilities (Isaacs, 2016). Self-assessment test (SAT) offers a promising alternative, allowing individuals to evaluate their own language skills based on predetermined criteria (Winke et al. 2023). Research suggests that SAT can enhance learners' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, leading to more targeted language practice (Hosseini & Nimehchisalem, 2021).

Numerous research works have underscored the significance of English language competence among educators, especially in environments where English serves as a second or foreign language (Van Canh & Renandya, 2017). Dewaele and Leung (2022) discovered that highly skilled teachers demonstrated superior performance in "classroom practice" and "attitudes toward students and institution," which were linked to increased levels of motivation and contentment. Teachers of EFL with advanced proficiency (C1–C2) fared much better than those with intermediate proficiency (B1–B2). Among educators proficient at the lower advanced (C1) and upper advanced (C2) tiers, no appreciable variations were found. Generally speaking, Faez and Karas (2017) found that competent language teachers need to possess advanced competency in the language, but pedagogical abilities are also essential for good instruction.

Over the years, educators have shown a growing interest in the practice of SAT, which involves individuals reflecting on their own performance and abilities. Among educators focusing on second language (L2) teaching, SAT gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s as attention moved from mere language analysis to understanding how language beginners actually acquire a new language. Various tools, such as can-do statements and SAT descriptors, have been developed specifically for teaching second languages. These tools align with frameworks like the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2022) and were formulated by bodies such as the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL).

Components of SAT are commonly integrated into textbooks and other resources used for L2 learning, including online applications. SAT serves as a valuable complement to other assessment methods such as portfolios, peer evaluations, and traditional objective assessments. Self-regulation can help students establish more effective study habits, strengthen their learning capacities, and apply learning approaches that enhance their knowledge of the subject (Newman & Newman, 2020; Carter Jr et al., 2020). This shifts the emphasis to learner-centered teaching, which amplifies students' active learning and knowledge construction through self-monitoring (Van Loon et al., 2021) and active learning (Du Plessis, 2020).

Eventhough SAT is widely promoted through curriculum efforts and legislation, there are differences in how SAT is implemented in language classes, and SAT is frequently not employed as well as anticipated in reality (Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin, 2020). One reason for the reluctance to implement SA in classrooms could be how users perceive it; for instance, teachers might question the veracity of their students' SAT, and students might not think of SAT as being beneficial to their learning (Mäkipää, 2021).

Andrews (2016) states that SAT promotes cognitive growth by having students question what they have learned. This allows teachers to have an impact on students' capacity to connect reality with the material being taught. Martinez (2020) reports that speaking competence scores in recordings were significantly increased by SAT. Furthermore, as it can enhance the ability for SAT, which promotes lifelong learning abilities, SAT helps graduates build the necessary qualities in the English language. Similarly, the method of SAT prompts English teachers to consider whether the student needs to improve on content-related skills as well as their punctuality.

Teachers often practice SAT to gauge one's own activity and language talents (Brown et al., 2015), a method advocated by many scholars in language assessment. Yan et al. (2021) underscored SA as a valuable device for students' academic advancement, enabling them evaluating their own

learning, identify strengths and weaknesses, and enhance self-regulation abilities (Harris & Brown, 2018; Yan & Boud, 2022). Active participation in SAT promotes dedication, autonomy, and self-efficacy (Panadero et al., 2016). It reduces dependence on teachers and enhances intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning. Various methods, including interviews, role-plays, and technology, are employed for testing speaking skills (Başak, 2019).

SAT has gained prominence in language learning contexts as a means of promoting learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness (Alghanmi, 2023). In the realm of teacher education, the endorsement of SAT as a catalyst for professional advancement persists, affording educators the opportunity to introspect on their methods and pinpoint avenues for enhancement (Rinehart, 2021). However, the use of SAT specifically for evaluating teacher speaking proficiency remains relatively unexplored.

In today's interconnected global society, the prevalence of English as the common language has grown exponentially, permeating various spheres such as communication, commerce, and education (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019). With English serving as the primary medium for international interaction and trade, the demand for competent English educators has surged, particularly in regions where English is not the native language (Luanganggoon, 2020). This surge underscores the critical role of proficient English teachers in facilitating effective language instruction and fostering cross-cultural communication.

Despite the increasing demand for English teachers, the proficiency levels of educators, especially in spoken English, exhibit significant disparities (Gul & Aziz, 2015). This variability poses a substantial challenge, as the quality of language instruction in primary schools is intricately linked to the proficiency of teachers. Effective verbal communication skills are fundamental to language learning, enabling teachers to engage students, convey concepts clearly, and facilitate meaningful interactions in the classroom.

Although considerable research has investigated educators' language proficiency, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the precise evaluation of speaking proficiency among first-cycle primary school English teachers (Adams, 2020). This gap holds particular significance due to the crucial role of oral communication in language acquisition and the cultivation of language abilities in young learners. Without a thorough grasp of teachers' speaking proficiency, assessing their effectiveness in delivering English language instruction and pinpointing areas for professional development becomes challenging (Williams, 2019).

The present study endeavors to address the gap obtained by probing the speaking proficiency of first-cycle primary school English teachers through SAT. By focusing on speaking skills, the purpose of this study is to illuminate the difficulties and prospects within language instruction at the primary level. It proposes using self-assessment tests to evaluate teachers' speaking proficiency, enabling educators to reflect on their abilities and areas for improvement. However, there is still a necessity to thoroughly evaluate teachers' English speaking proficiency and delve into how demographic factors like gender, educational background, and teaching experience might affect their linguistic skills. Hence, this study seeks to bridge these gaps by gauging the fluency of English teachers in Ethiopian first-cycle primary schools and analyzing how demographic variables influence their self-assessment outcomes. The formulated research questions guide the investigation, ensuring alignment with study objectives and emphasizing the importance of incorporating quantitative research in assessing English teachers' speaking proficiency.

1. Do English teachers in first-cycle primary schools have low ratings for the speaking proficiency component of their SAT?
2. Is there any significant difference in the mean score of English-speaking proficiency among first-cycle primary school teachers based on gender and education qualifications?
3. Is there any significant difference in mean English speaking proficiency scores among first-cycle primary school English teachers, based on their categories of teaching service length?

4. To what extent do demographic characteristics like gender, educational qualifications, and years of teaching experience determine the English-spoken proficiency of first-cycle English teachers in their teaching?

LITERATURE REVIEW

English language proficiency

Language proficiency, in general, refers to the capacity to use language for a range of communication objectives. Proficient users are those who possess a good command of the language, meaning they can communicate with other speakers intelligibly, grasp a wide range of concepts both orally and in writing, and interact with them without difficulty (Richards, 2018). English language proficiency, as defined by scholars such as Runde and Nealer (2017), entails the adept and precise utilization of English across diverse contexts, encompassing academic, professional, and social settings. It signifies the ability to comprehend, articulate, and compose English with fluency and accuracy, indicative of one's communicative capabilities. Sijali (2017) further emphasized proficiency as effective real-world communication, denoting an individual's demonstrated competence and capability in the language. Additionally, Rudd and Honkiss (2020) underscored the importance of proficiency in various communication purposes, crucial for academic success and fostering effective student-teacher communication. The concept of proficiency has evolved to incorporate factors like academic literacies and translanguaging, highlighting its dynamic nature. Within educational environments, English language proficiency is paramount for academic achievement and effective communication, comprising multiple components that necessitate diverse language knowledge and skills application. Therefore, proficiency involves a spectrum of actions rather than a singular concept, vital for navigating diverse linguistic contexts proficiently.

Nature of English language proficiency

English language proficiency embodies a holistic grasp, usage, and mastery of English, encompassing grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics, and sociolinguistic nuances. It entails effective communication across diverse contexts, showcasing fluency, accuracy, and cultural understanding. Proficiency is multifaceted, comprising receptive and productive language skills, along with adaptability to varying situations and audiences. Armea et al. (2022) highlight proficiency's dynamic nature, emphasizing its real-world application and interactional competence, transcending language learning approaches. Harsch (2017) underscores its significance in language teaching, learning, and assessment, stressing not only linguistic fluency but also practical application. Proficiency is deemed essential for success in professional and academic domains, extending beyond fluency to encompass nuanced understanding and tailored application in specific contexts. In essence, proficiency denotes the ability to communicate, engage, and succeed effectively within chosen fields, reflecting both linguistic competence and practical aptitude.

Teachers' English language proficiency and its uses in teaching speaking English

English language proficiency is indispensable for English language teachers to excel in their profession. It encompasses both oral proficiency and subject knowledge proficiency, playing a pivotal role in ensuring professional competence. According to Richards et al. (2013), a teacher's expertise in the subject matter, including proficiency in the target language, is essential for effective language instruction. Farrell and Richards (2007) further emphasized that a teacher's level of English language proficiency often dictates their ability to employ modern teaching techniques and provide students with accurate language input. Renandya et al. (2018) asserted that English language proficiency is a cornerstone of an English language teacher's professional expertise. In essence, proficiency in English is a fundamental component that underpins effective teaching in the field.

Effects of English teachers' demographic profiles in teaching speaking

English teachers' experiences and teaching speaking

Teacher preparation, according to [Scheerens \(2000\)](#), encompasses educators' ability to meet professional standards, apply them effectively, and exercise sound judgment across diverse educational contexts. This proficiency is honed through practical experience in the classroom. According to [Scheerens \(2000\)](#), teaching experience is paramount for enhancing and elevating learner performance. [Wandera et al. \(2019\)](#) further underscore the global significance of instructional quality in shaping student outcomes and classroom dynamics. In essence, the quality of teacher preparation and experience plays a pivotal role in fostering effective learning environments and facilitating student achievement on a worldwide scale.

English teacher's academic qualifications levels and teaching speaking

According to [Lydia and Migosi \(2015\)](#), a qualified teacher is one who not only facilitates students' acquisition of new knowledge and skills but also meets the minimum standards for teaching at a specific educational level. [Rivkin et al. \(2005\)](#) emphasize that ensuring high-quality instruction and improving learning outcomes necessitate exceptional teacher education and training. The effectiveness of a teacher should be readily apparent and comprehensible, with credentials such as degrees, diplomas, and certifications serving as tangible indicators of qualification. However, ensuring teacher qualification goes beyond simply providing training and development programs, as highlighted by [Scheerens \(2000\)](#). In addition to formal qualifications, robust codes of conduct are essential to align with the goals of universal education ([Moon, 2013](#)). Therefore, achieving effective outcomes in universal lower secondary schools hinges on the presence of highly committed and qualified teachers ([Moon, 2013](#)). In essence, the attainment of educational objectives depends on not only the formal qualifications of teachers but also their dedication and adherence to ethical standards.

Teachers' gender disparity and teaching speaking

Speaking involves an interactive process where individuals engage in conversation by taking turns, akin to a smooth, rotating wheel ([Skantze, 2021](#)). This turn-taking behavior is often unconscious and varies across genders and cultures, with men typically displaying more assertiveness, dominance, and interruptions compared to women, thus leading to predominantly male-led interactions in mixed-gender settings. Research by [Skantze \(2021\)](#) also has investigated the linguistic differences between men and women, identifying variations in tone, word choice, frequency, and the use of specific structures in different contexts. These observations underscore the nuanced dynamics of communication, shaped by both gender and cultural influences.

English language speaking skills

Speaking served as a crucial method for sharing information and expressing feelings, thoughts, and ideas orally in daily life ([Bahrani et al., 2020](#)). It is indispensable for interacting with others to achieve specific goals ([Bouaassria, 2016](#)) and allows us to shape, modify, and organize our ideas effectively for communication ([Campos, 2013](#)). This skill is fundamental in exchanging information during face-to-face or phone conversations, transcending mere pronunciation correctness to include the systematic expression of intended meanings. Importantly, speaking plays a pivotal role in fostering students' verbal communication proficiency ([Campos, 2013](#)). Conceptualized as an interactive process for constructing meaning ([Leong & Ahmadi, 2017](#)), speaking involves generating, receiving, and comprehending information. [Torky \(2014\)](#) characterizes speaking as an active endeavor focused on creating meaning through the production, reception, and interpretation of information. Moreover, speaking serves as a means of connecting with others and sharing ideas, perspectives, and opinions while also facilitating posing questions, obtaining responses, and conveying messages to articulate one's needs ([Nurkhalis, 2018](#)).

Assessing English language teachers' speaking proficiency

The evaluation of teachers' speaking abilities encompasses various aspects including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, and fluency (Ounis, 2017). Garcia (2019) supported this assertion, highlighting the use of speaking rubrics to assess students' speaking skills, considering factors such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. These criteria are also integral to speaking diagnostic tests aimed at evaluating teachers' oral proficiency. The assessment criteria typically include fluency, delivery, organization, and the use of appropriate language, which encompasses comprehension, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and lexical choice. Conversely, Mazouzi (2013) categorized these components into fluency and accuracy, incorporating comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. These experts collectively emphasize six key components essential for evaluating speaking proficiency: grammatical mastery, accuracy, fluency, vocabulary mastery, comprehension, and pronunciation.

Richards (2018) underscored that language proficiency extends to the versatile use of a language across diverse communication contexts. Proficient individuals demonstrate adeptness in comprehending the language, expressing a wide range of ideas through both oral and written means, and engaging effortlessly in dialogue with others. According to Richards (2018), assessing proficiency in English speaking commonly involves evaluating six performance indicators: accuracy, fluency, complexity, pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension. These indicators collectively gauge an individual's mastery of the language and their ability to communicate effectively in different settings. By focusing on these aspects, educators and language learners can target specific skills to enhance overall speaking proficiency. Consequently, individuals who excel in these areas demonstrate not only linguistic competence but also confidence and proficiency in real-life communication scenarios.

METHOD

This study adopts a pragmatic research philosophy, ideal for mixed-method research that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches for a comprehensive understanding of research questions. Quantitative data was collected through SAT, while qualitative data was gathered via classroom observation. Pragmatism supports the use of diverse techniques, data types, and analyses, balancing subjective reflection with objective data collection and analysis (Shannon-Baker, 2015). As Creswell and Creswell (2017) noted, the strengths of one method can compensate for the weaknesses of another, enhancing research validity and reliability. This method aligns with the study's objectives by utilizing both numerical and narrative techniques, integrating diverse methods to avoid bias through triangulation. The flexibility of pragmatism allows the selection of appropriate viewpoints, methods, and procedures from various paradigms to effectively address research problems. This approach is particularly suited to investigating the speaking proficiency of first-cycle primary school English teachers, combining data from different sources and methods to answer the research questions comprehensively.

First, the researcher informed the participants that the study's purpose was to assess the English-speaking proficiency of first-cycle primary school English teachers. After explaining the study's objective, the researcher employed simple random sampling to ensure an unbiased and equitable representation of these teachers. This method aims to eliminate selection biases by providing every teacher in the target population with an equal chance of participating. Utilizing simple random sampling enhanced the generalizability of the study's findings to the broader population of first-cycle primary school English teachers. From the entire population, fifteen English teachers were randomly selected for classroom observation using the lottery method, and one hundred and one English teachers were randomly chosen for the SAT.

A variety of techniques are available to assess speaking skills, including interviews, information gap activities, picture-based tests, role-plays, self-assessments, cloze tests, semi-direct assessments, band descriptors, and the integration of technology. For this study, the primary instruments for data collection were the SAT and classroom observations. The SAT, adapted from established assessments such as IELTS and TOEFL, measures English speaking proficiency based on IELTS criteria.

Classroom observations, informed by existing literature, ensured a systematic and thorough evaluation process in the form of open-ended questions. This combination allowed for a comprehensive exploration of language proficiency, encompassing both controlled assessment environments and authentic classroom interactions, thereby reinforcing the study's conclusions.

SAT, drawing on formative assessment, is a valuable pedagogical tool promoting critical thinking and self-regulated learning (Alghanmi, 2023). It encourages teachers to reflect on their speaking abilities, fostering autonomy and self-awareness, and providing standardized measures of proficiency crucial for ongoing professional growth (Thompson, 2020). Developed and adjusted specifically for English language teachers (ELTs), these tools assess various competencies, including vocabulary, grammar, fluency, complexity, pronunciation, and comprehension. The self-assessment instrument, part of a comprehensive survey with five-point Likert scale statements, was rigorously tested and validated by TEFL specialists to ensure its relevance and accuracy. This contextualized tool gathers valuable feedback, identifies areas for improvement, and tailors professional development programs. By employing self-assessment during research, educators gain insights into teachers' abilities and needs, supporting a holistic evaluation and enhancing teaching effectiveness.

Classroom observation is one of the research tools that the researcher employed to gather data for the current study. It is a vital tool for researchers, helping to gather data effectively (Decano, 2023). It is widely used in educational institutions to assess and improve teaching quality. In this study, it is utilized for data triangulation. The focus is on observing English teaching, specifically speaking skills. This allows assessment of grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, pronunciation, and complex sentence usage. The aim is to gauge the English proficiency of first-cycle primary school teachers. Observation provides a comprehensive understanding of their speaking aptitude in real-world classroom settings, affirming that this method yields detailed insights into their implementations and processes. It captures the entire context, enabling researchers to observe, listen, and record behaviors in their natural setting.

Data collection procedures

Prior to commencing the research-related activities, several preliminary tasks were undertaken to facilitate the smooth execution of the study. Initially, support letters were secured from Wollega University's School of Graduate Studies (SGS) bureau and the English department, serving as formal endorsements of the research endeavor. The researcher then visited randomly selected schools, presenting these letters to the appropriate authorities. Through direct communication, the researcher engaged with school administrators and English teachers, explaining the purpose of the research and seeking their consent to participate. This process ensured transparency and collaboration between the researcher and the educational institutions. Following the consent, quantitative data was collected through SAT administered by the researcher. Whereas, to validate the collected data, classroom observations were conducted focusing on grammar usage, pronunciation, fluency, teacher-student interactions, and overall comprehension of English. Open-ended questions guided these observations, and audio equipment was used to ensure precise documentation. This methodological approach provided comprehensive insights into the teaching dynamics and proficiency levels of the teachers, enhancing the validity of the research findings.

Data analysis method and interpretation

The study employed varieties of research techniques to explore its goals. In order to understand the research questions, statistical analysis—including inferential tests and descriptive statistics—was combined with narrative approaches. This method gave evidence-based insights into the English teachers speaking proficiency in first-cycle primary schools. For instance, the researcher used independent samples t-tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multiple regression techniques. The independent samples t-test compared the mean scores of English teachers' self-assessments based on gender and educational levels. One-way ANOVA was employed to compare the means across more than two groups. Multiple regression analysis was utilized to model and analyze the relationships

between the dependent and independent variables, specifically examining the impacts of gender disparity, educational level, and teaching experience on English teaching proficiency in first-cycle primary schools.

Quantitative analysis, conducted employing SPSS version 26.00, involved demanding statistical procedures such as calculating mean, standard deviation, and assessing normality, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, uncovering themes and contextual complexities in classroom observations. Furthermore, the careful narrative analysis organized qualitative materials systematically based on speaking proficiency components. By integrating quantitative indicators from the self-assessment tool and qualitative data from classroom observations, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of its research questions. Specifically, employing a one-phase mixed methods convergent design, both quantitative and qualitative data were assembled and analyzed, and their findings were merged to assess consistency or divergence.

RESULTS

This section presents the results derived from a meticulous analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were utilized to analyze the quantitative data to thoroughly assess the suitability of the recommended statistical procedures and data-gathering tools for their intended purposes. Meanwhile, a comprehensive thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted, and the outcomes are reviewed in this section to determine whether or not they agree with the quantitative findings. Finally, the analytical and interpretive processes were guided by the pertinent research questions indicated below.

Respondents demographic characteristics

Table 1

Participants' total demographic characteristics

Categories	Gender			Education levels			Teaching Experiences (years)					
	M	F	Tot	Dip	BA	Tot	0-3	4-7	8-12	13-20	>20	Tot
SA	45	56	101	61	40	101	21	23	19	24	14	101
Percent (%)	39.6	60.4	100	60.4	39.6	100	20.8	22.8	18.8	23.8	13.8	100
CLO	6	9	15	10	5	15	4	3	4	3	1	15
Percent (%)	40	60	100	66.7	33.3	100	26.7	20	26.7	20	6.6	100

Table 1 indicates the demographic details of the participants during classroom observation (CLO) and SAT. It helps us understand the participants' self-assessment and guides further analysis and decision-making. Out of 101 respondents, 39.6% were males (45 participants) and 60.4% were females (56 participants). In terms of education, 39.6% had a BA degree (40 participants) and 60.4% had a Diploma (61 participants).

Teaching experience was classified according to Ademola et al.'s (2021) framework. Among English teachers, 20.8% (21 participants) had 0 to 3 years of experience, 22.8% (23 participants) had 4 to 7 years, 18.8% (19 participants) had 8 to 12 years, 23.8% (24 participants) had 13 to 20 years, and 13.8% (14 participants) had over 20 years of teaching experience, as noted in the SAT.

Table 1 provides insights into the gender distribution, educational qualifications, and teaching experiences of the respondents. Specifically, it outlines the demographic profiles of participants during CLO, encompassing gender, educational qualifications, and teaching experience. The observation comprised fifteen English teachers, with 40% being male and 60% female. Regarding educational qualifications, 66.7% held a Diploma certificate while 33.3% possessed a BA degree. In terms of teaching experience, 26.7% had 0 to 3 years, 20% had 4 to 7 years, 26.7% had 8 to 12 years, 20% had 13 to 20 years, and 6.6% had over 20 years of teaching experience.

English teachers speaking proficiency of first-cycle primary schools

The primary aim was to assess the English language proficiency of first-cycle primary school English teachers. Teachers self-assessed while the researcher observed classes. The test outcomes were

subsequently analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The rubric they employed consisted of five categories: extremely poor (1), low (2), moderate (3), high (4), and very high proficiency (5) (Gul & Aziz, 2015). The test had six parts, each scored out of five, totaling 30 points.

Table 2

Self-assessment of primary school English Teachers' speaking proficiency

No.	Speaking components	Mean	CM	CSD
1	Comprehension	2.41		
2	Pronunciation	2.17		
3	Fluency	2.14	2.3	0.62
4	Vocabulary	2.42		
5	Grammar	2.38		
6	Complexity	2.25		

The SAT results in Table 2 reveal a concerning trend: English teachers' speaking proficiency is notably low, with an overall mean score of 2.3 out of 5 and varied component scores falling below average. This indicates a struggle among first-cycle teachers in grasping proficiency elements, as evidenced by the mean score of 2.3 and a standard deviation of 0.62. Concurrently, classroom observations unveil pervasive challenges such as the prevalent use of native language over English, grammatical errors, limited vocabulary, and difficulties in fluency, comprehension, accuracy, complexity, and pronunciation. These observations highlighted a significant proficiency gap, emphasizing the urgent need for improvement. Employing a convergent design, this study integrates quantitative and qualitative data, revealing consistently low proficiency trends both in self-assessment data (mean = 2.3, standard deviation = 0.62) and classroom observations. This collaborative analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the insufficient speaking proficiency among first-cycle English teachers in the East Wollega Zone. These findings indicated an urgent need for targeted interventions to improve the speaking proficiency of these teachers, as their current level of proficiency may adversely affect their ability to effectively teach English.

Table 3

Gender differences of self-assessment test outputs

Independent Samples Test SA							
Components	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	SED
Comprehension	1.766	0.19	0.24	99	0.81	0.03	0.12
			0.25	98.9	0.81	0.03	0.12
Pronunciation	2.054	0.16	-0.86	99	0.39	-0.10	0.12
			-0.86	97.2	0.39	-0.10	0.12
Fluency	0.044	0.84	1.11	99	0.27	0.15	0.14
			1.12	97.8	0.26	0.15	0.13
Vocabulary	0.443	0.51	1.31	99	0.19	0.15	0.12
			1.33	97.9	0.19	0.15	0.12
Grammar	7.370	0.01	1.65	99	0.10	0.19	0.11
			1.61	83.4	0.11	0.19	0.11
Complexity	0.158	0.69	1.73	99	0.09	0.23	0.14
			1.76	98.7	0.08	0.23	0.13

Table 3 presents the statistical analysis of gender differences in SAT results, focusing on English teachers' speaking skills. The statistical study showed the following results: $t(0.03) = 0.24$, $p = 0.81$, $df = 99$ for comprehension; $t(-0.10) = -0.86$, $p = 0.39$, $df = 99$ for pronunciation; $t(0.15) = 1.11$, $p = 0.27$, $df = 99$ for fluency; $t(0.15) = 1.31$, $p = 0.19$, $df = 99$ for vocabulary; $t(0.19) = 1.65$, $p = 0.11$, $df = 99$ for grammar; and $t(0.23) = 1.73$, $p = 0.09$, $df = 99$ for complexity. These findings indicated that

no significant differences in speaking proficiency components were observed between male and female English teachers.

The researcher analyzed classroom observation data, specifically looking at gender variances among respondents. Many English teachers faced challenges teaching in English, often reverting to their native language. Common issues included sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary. Problems with fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, comprehension, and constructing complex sentences were also observed. Overall, there were no significant gender differences in speaking proficiency. This indicates that most English teachers in the observed schools had below-average speaking proficiency levels, regardless of gender.

The study employed a mixed methods approach, blending quantitative and qualitative designs for comprehensive insights. Using a convergent design combines both methods to gather complementary data. Quantitative analysis, conducted with independent sample t-tests, indicated speaking proficiency scores consistently above .05 for all components. This indicated that there were no significant differences in speaking proficiency components between male and female English teachers. Qualitative findings from classroom observations align closely with quantitative results. This implied that interventions aimed at improving speaking proficiency should be gender-neutral, addressing the common challenges faced by all teachers, regardless of gender. This concurrent integration allowed for simultaneous interpretation of both types of data, unveiling shortcomings in speaking proficiency among first-cycle primary school teachers.

English teachers' disparities in education qualification level

The study compares English speaking proficiency between BA degree and diploma holders using self-assessment results. It focuses on differences among first-cycle primary school English teachers in aspects like pronunciation, comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and complexity. Furthermore, the study monitors how these distinctions develop over time.

Table 4

Independent samples test outputs of the SAT in education level

Independent Samples Test of SA							
Components	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	SED
Comprehension	0.32	0.57	-6.8	99	0.000	-0.69	0.10
			-7.08	92.97	0.000	-0.69	0.10
Pronunciation	1.45	0.23	-3.29	99	0.001	-0.38	0.12
			-3.44	94.94	0.001	-0.38	0.11
Fluency	0.30	0.58	-4.39	99	0.000	-0.56	0.13
			-4.56	93.38	0.000	-0.56	0.12
Vocabulary	1.60	0.208	-3.65	99	0.000	-0.41	0.11
			-3.84	95.63	0.000	-0.41	0.11
Grammar	1.64	0.203	-5.56	99	0.000	-0.56	0.10
			-5.52	81.58	0.000	-0.56	0.10
Complexity	0.21	0.65	-3.84	99	0.000	-0.50	0.13
			-4.12	98.48	0.000	-0.50	0.12

Table 4 illustrates statistically significant variations in speaking proficiency components among English teachers with a BA and those with a diploma. Six components of speaking proficiency were examined for variations in educational background using an independent sample t-test. The findings disclosed substantial dissimilarities in vocabulary ($t = -3.65$, $p = .000$), grammar ($t = -5.56$, $p = .000$), comprehension ($t = -6.8$, $p = .000$), pronunciation ($t = -3.29$, $p = .001$), fluency ($t = -4.39$, $p = .000$), and complexity ($t = -3.84$, $p = .000$). There were significant variations in the proficiency components

between English teachers with a BA degree and those with a diploma, as indicated by all p-values being less than 0.05.

Classroom observation data was assessed based on participants' educational backgrounds. Teachers with diplomas showed below-average speaking skills, while those with BAs demonstrated acceptable proficiency. Unlike BA degree holders, most diploma teachers struggled with teaching the target language. Overall, English teachers with BAs had moderate proficiency, contrasting sharply with the poor proficiency of diploma teachers. The quantitative data analysis partially supported these qualitative findings.

A parallel mixed methods design integrated quantitative and qualitative data to gather, analyze, and interpret information. Independent sample t-tests uncovered notable distinctions in English speaking proficiency between English teachers holding BA degrees and those with diplomas. Classroom observations further supported these findings, highlighting differences based on education qualification levels. The convergent design integrated quantitative and qualitative results, affirming significant disparities among participants' education levels. This implied that higher educational qualifications may contribute to better English speaking proficiency in teachers, potentially affecting their teaching quality and student outcomes.

Participants' differences in their teaching experience categories on the SA data outputs

The paper mainly compares English teachers in first-grade primary schools based on their years of experience. It looks at differences in speaking skills like complexity, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, and fluency. Its goal is to understand how teaching experience affects these skills among first-grade English teachers.

Table 5

ANOVA outputs for SA of participants in their length of teaching experiences

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Comprehension	Between Groups	4.3	4	1.074	3.22	.016
	Within Groups	32.1	96	.334		
Pronunciation	Between Groups	6.5	4	1.613	5.22	.001
	Within Groups	29.7	96	.309		
Fluency	Between Groups	6.4	4	1.595	3.86	.006
	Within Groups	39.7	96	.413		
Vocabulary	Between Groups	3.6	4	.896	2.76	.024
	Within Groups	31.1	96	.324		
Grammar	Between Groups	2.3	4	.574	1.86	.117
	Within Groups	29.6	96	.309		
Complexity	Between Groups	4.5	4	1.133	2.57	.043
	Within Groups	42.3	96	.440		

Table 5 displays the ANOVA results for speaking skills based on teaching experience. One-way ANOVA was used to find differences. Results showed significant differences in comprehension ($F = 3.22$, $P = 0.016$), pronunciation ($F = 5.22$, $P = .001$), fluency ($F = 3.86$, $P = .006$), vocabulary ($F = 2.76$, $P = .024$), and complexity ($F = 2.57$, $P = .043$), but not in grammar ($F = 1.86$, $P = .117$). This means teaching experience affects speaking skills except for grammar.

SAT data and qualitative information gleaned from classroom observations were integrated in this study. Based on their results on English proficiency tests, teachers were divided into three distinct groups: near-moderate (20+ years), below average (4-7, 8-12, 13-20 years), and low (0-3 years). The significance of these changes was verified by a one-way ANOVA test. The study examined the relationship between teaching experience and English-speaking ability and found that teachers with more than twenty years of experience outperformed those with less experience. The implication is that extensive teaching experience contributes positively to English speaking proficiency, suggesting that experience enhances language skills, which could influence teaching effectiveness and,

consequently, student learning outcomes. This emphasizes the value of experience in professional development for English teachers.

Table 6

Regression analysis outputs of SA of demographic profile of respondents

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R	R ²
	B	Std. Error	Beta				
1 (Constant)	1.34	.169		7.908	.000		
Gender	.041	.068	.047	.600	.550	.664	.441
Experiences	.095	.026	.302	3.666	.000		
Education Level	.442	.071	.508	6.218	.000		

Table 6 displays the multiple regression results from SPSS self-assessment data, showing predictor variables for respondents. Gender had a minimal contribution ($\beta = -0.047$, $p = 0.55$), explaining 4.1% of the variance. Teaching experience contributed less substantially ($\beta = 0.302$, $p = 0.000$), explaining 9.5% of the variance. Education qualification correlated significantly with speaking proficiency ($\beta = 0.508$, $p = 0.000$), explaining 44.2% of the variance.

The R square value included a multiple regression model summary of each variable's unique variance and shared variance. Respectable correlation ($R^2 = .441$) was shown among the three independent factors and the predicted variables in this setting. Thus, when both variables were simultaneously included in the model in relation to SA, a significant amount of shared variance was statistically estimated.

The analysis of classroom observation data also elucidated the significant influence exerted by three key independent variables on teachers' speaking proficiency. Through thorough observation, the researcher discerned a notable coherence between the findings derived from classroom observation data analysis and those stemming from self-assessment measures. This alignment underscores the predictive influence of gender, educational attainment, and teaching experience levels on the deficient oral proficiency demonstrated by the respondents.

The data collected from the participants was analyzed by the researchers using standard multiple regression. With an R^2 value of 44.1%, the three independent variables from the SAT partially explained the dependent variables. Poor performance was also observed in the speaking abilities of English teachers in the classroom. The researchers discovered that the independent variables had a moderate impact on the dependent ones after combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. This showed that English teachers in East Wollega Zone's first-cycle primary schools have low speaking proficiency. The implication is that various factors contribute to the low speaking proficiency among these teachers, pointing to a need for targeted interventions to improve their language skills, which could enhance their teaching effectiveness and benefit student learning outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The study's discussion aimed to interpret and elucidate the research findings concerning the investigated research problem. It also sought to offer explanations for any novel information or insights that arose from the findings' examination. While the research questions and literature review were introduced earlier, the discussion transcends mere repetition or rearrangement. Instead, it delves into how the study has enriched the reader's comprehension of the research problem compared to the introduction's presentation.

Data were gathered from sampled groups using a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. Respondents scored their speaking skills against predetermined options through questionnaires, while quantitative data came from SAT and qualitative insights from classroom observations. Raters assessed SAT data using Manuel's (2022) speaking

evaluation rubrics, ensuring a thorough understanding of participants' speaking abilities and enhancing research findings. Results were categorized by gender, educational attainment, and teaching experience before quantitative and qualitative analysis. The section concludes with insightful conclusions after acknowledging research limitations and highlighting areas for further investigation.

SAT data-gathering instruments were shown to be reliable. Speaking components showed consistent behavior, as evidenced by a high correlation ($r = 77.4\%$). Cronbach alpha coefficients confirmed the association between speech components and target constructs, proving the validity and reliability of the instruments.

The first research question intended to find the mean score status in speaking proficiency among English teachers with varying skill levels (very high, high, moderate, low, and very low). Both descriptive statistics and classroom observations revealed that teachers generally had low speaking proficiency. This corresponds with the findings of [Gul and Aziz \(2015\)](#), who identified analogous gaps in teaching competencies, encompassing vocabulary, oral communication, pronunciation, intonation, assessment, and test preparation. The results substantiate the conclusions drawn in the present study.

The second study topic aimed to identify significant variations in English teachers' demographic profiles, specifically focusing on gender and education level. Initially, the study examined differences in speaking proficiency between male and female teachers. The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in SAT scores ($P > 0.05$), though male teachers showed a slight advantage. This aligns with [Torres-Guijarro and Bengoechea's \(2016\)](#) findings, where male teachers performed slightly better overall. However, observations indicated poor performance among male teachers and even worse performance among female teachers. These results are consistent with recent studies highlighting gender disparities in communication skills, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation ([Vonkova et al., 2023](#); [Mashhadlou & Izadpanah, 2021](#)).

Additionally, the second research question analyzed the educational gap between English teachers with diplomas and bachelor's degrees. The study found a significant difference ($P < .05$) in speaking proficiency scores between these two groups in SAT. However, the speaking competency of English language teachers in first-cycle primary schools in the East Wollega zone was below average, as shown by the mean SAT scores. Classroom observations revealed that teachers with bachelor's degrees demonstrated a modest level of speaking proficiency, while those with diplomas achieved below-average results. This qualitative insight aligned with the quantitative findings, consistent with previous research.

Students' academic success is greatly impacted by teachers' educational backgrounds ([Hongliang & Depaynos, 2024](#)). In order to improve teaching efficacy in pre-primary schools, [Lee and Lee's \(2020\)](#) recent studies emphasized the significance of having the necessary certifications. The academic achievement of students and the qualifications of teachers are statistically correlated, as shown by [Casian et al. \(2021\)](#). [Yoshikawa and Kabay \(2015\)](#) asserted that proficient pre-primary educators, possessing the necessary abilities and understanding, enable meaningful exchanges that impact the growth of young learners. According to [Manning et al. \(2019\)](#), there is a significant relationship between teacher qualifications and higher-quality early childhood education and care facilities, which affects a number of program quality factors.

The third research question examined how teachers' years of experience affect their English proficiency. Quantitative analysis showed no significant differences among teachers except in grammar self-assessment scores ($P > 0.05$). Descriptive analysis revealed better performance for teachers with over twenty years of experience. Qualitative findings indicated low proficiency for 0-3 years, below average for 4-7 and 7-12 years, and moderate for over 20 years. These findings support previous studies suggesting that as teachers gain experience, their proficiency improves, positively impacting student outcomes ([Pennington and Richards, 2016](#)). [Alonge et al., \(2020\)](#) also found a substantial correlation between teaching experience, educational qualification, and students' academic success.

The fourth research question explored how demographic features impact English teachers' speaking proficiency. It aimed to identify statistically significant differences in gender, educational

background, and teaching experience to understand their effects on speaking ability. [Francisco \(2020\)](#) provided insights into teachers' personal demographic features, including age, gender, employment duration, academic rank, and degrees. Regression analysis revealed significant variations in education qualification level and teaching experience ($P < .05$), while gender showed no difference.

The unique contribution of each variable to the dependent variable was explained by the R-square value in the model summary for multiple regressions, which also showed a moderate association (44.1%) between the results of the SAT and independent variables. This is consistent with previous research on the effects of academic credentials and teacher preparation on oral language teaching methods conducted by [Okelo et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Machado \(2007\)](#). While Machado emphasised the significance of having a high degree for preschool teachers teaching second languages, [Obeka \(2021\)](#) provided evidence of a strong relationship between teachers' credentials and their students' English proficiency, supporting Okelo et al.'s assertion that lower qualifications are linked to lower quality instruction.

Research findings reveal a direct correlation between teachers' experience and students' academic success, as noted by [Sanda \(2013\)](#). This assertion gains further support from evidence suggesting a link between the attributes and abilities of teachers, as highlighted by [Asio and Riego de Dios \(2019\)](#). Moreover, [Crawford \(2017\)](#) has observed a strong association between speaking proficiency and both years of experience and age. These insights underscore the importance of experience in shaping teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. [Fakeye \(2012\)](#) has also highlighted the good impact of teaching service. However, as [Bonney et al. \(2015\)](#) found experience is more important than academic or professional credentials when it comes to influencing a teacher's performance. Similar to this, [Christopher and Redempta \(2016\)](#) highlight variations in performance due to gender. Amid these conflicting results, the proposed research aims to assess how teachers' demographic characteristics affect their English speaking proficiency in a new educational setting, bridging the gap between experience, qualifications, and actual performance.

CONCLUSION

The concept of self-assessment stands as an innovative tool with significant implications for education, particularly in the realm of English language acquisition. Thus, the meticulous analysis undertaken in this study clearly emphasized the pivotal role of both self-assessment tests and classroom observations in deriving meaningful conclusions. The computed descriptive statistics leave no room for doubt, highlighting a notable deficiency in speaking proficiency among first-cycle primary school English teachers, as evidenced by both self-assessment tests and classroom observations. Furthermore, the outcomes of the independent sample t-test painted a clear picture: there were no significant disparities in speaking ability between male and female English teachers, indicating that gender does not influence English proficiency among teachers. However, when considering teachers' experience and qualifications, discernible differences emerged. Notably, teachers with over two decades of experience exhibited superior performance in the facets of speaking proficiency compared to their less experienced counterparts, as validated by both self-assessment tests and classroom observations.

Moreover, the findings from the one-way ANOVA underscored significant discrepancies in speaking proficiency components based on educational qualification levels and teaching experiences, with the exception of grammar concerning teachers' teaching experiences. Finally, the synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data analyses revealed a thoughtful reality: the predictor variables exerted moderate influence on the predicted variables, indicating a low performance ($R^2=44.1\%$) in English teacher speaking proficiency within first-cycle primary schools of the East Wollega Zone, thereby highlighting the imperative for further interventions and enhancements in language teaching strategies. To improve speaking proficiency, we recommend targeted professional development for English teachers, especially those with less experience. Implement continuous assessment with regular feedback and peer review to support progress. Additionally, use technology-enhanced language tools and foster a collaborative learning environment to enhance overall teaching effectiveness.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors of the manuscript affirm that they have no conflicting interests.

Availability of data and materials

Upon request, the accompanying author can supply the data utilized to back up the study's conclusions.

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