



SOME MAJOR IMPACTS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TRAINING ON HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLAND OF VIETNAM

Nguyen Thi Ngoc Uyen*

University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, 57 Nguyen Khoa Chiem St., Hue, Vietnam

* Correspondence to Nguyen Thi Ngoc Uyen <ngocuyen.ukdk@gmail.com >

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Abstract: This article investigates the Central Highland EFL teachers' perceptions of the necessity and effectiveness of the national large-scale English language proficiency training to their teaching. One hundred and fifty teachers having experienced the English language proficiency training workshop(s) by authorized institutions and achieved the CEFR-C1 level as professional standards participated in the study. The study employed a mixed methods approach with concurrent research design and content-based data analysis. Data were collected through questionnaires, reflective reports and interviews. Overall, the findings have indicated that language proficiency training workshops were believed to help the teachers increase at least one level of language proficiency and master pedagogical skills. The teachers felt confident, motivated and proud of themselves as a result of attending the training workshops. On the basis of the findings, practical implications have been made so as to increase the sustainability of professional development activities for school teachers in remote areas.

Keywords: EFL teachers, language proficiency, professional development

1. Introduction

Since the implementation of the National Foreign Languages Project 2020 (Project 2020), the English language proficiency level of English language teachers has been promulgated in Vietnamese government policy. High school teachers are required to meet the CEFR-C1 level as described in the Council of Europe Framework of Reference (CEFR) (MOET, 2014). In-service English language teachers from high schools nationwide have been assessed and trained in terms of general language proficiency programs since 2016 so that they can attain a high level of English proficiency and are able to use English as a key means of communication in classrooms (MOET, 2014; MOET, 2017).

Project 2020 has a substantial influence on the teachers of English in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces. Thanks to it, most language teachers were trained in courses of English language proficiency for the target set for high school teachers at the level of C1 in CEFR. There has been an increase in opportunities for language teachers to focus on developing English proficiency levels and practicing English during the workshops. Together with language proficiency training workshops, since the academic school year 2016-2017, each year, about one hundred teachers from high schools in Gia Lai and Kon Tum have been selected by the Departments of Education and Training (DOET) to be trained in the ELTeach program of Cengage National Geographic Learning to improve professional knowledge skills by authorized universities. A number of short-term teacher professional development activities through seminars, meetings, in-service training workshops and presentations in national and international conferences, etc., were held annually by authorized institutes. In such language proficiency training activities, the target language is mostly adopted as the medium of instruction for providing language teachers with pedagogical knowledge and skills.

English language proficiency has been of considerable interest in many non-native English speaking countries (Baker, 2008; Butler, 2004; Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015; Littlewood & Yu, 2009; Kim & Elder, 2008; Le & Renandya, 2017; Pham, 2017; Pham, 2018). These researchers have documented EFL teachers' perceptions of target language proficiency. However, none of these seems to deal with the matter of post-training activities of English language proficiency in Vietnam in general and in the Central Highland of Vietnam in particular. While the efforts to improve Vietnamese EFL teachers' language proficiency have been vast and costly on the national level, the effect of those efforts can only be reflected first and foremost by the stakeholders, especially the teachers themselves. Moreover, EFL teachers in the Central Highland are generally more disadvantaged than those in other areas of the country. Therefore, by employing a mixed-methods approach, this research is believed to provide unique insights into mountainous EFL high school teachers' perceptions of the national-large scale English language proficiency training as part of professional development in terms of the necessity and effectiveness of the language proficiency activities. On the basis of the findings, practical implications have been made so as to increase the sustainability of professional development for high school teachers in remote, mountainous areas.

2. Literature review

2.1. English language proficiency

Many notions of English language proficiency have been discussed in the research on second language acquisition over the last 50 years. First, the concept of English language

proficiency can be examined from different aspects. In the early 80s, language proficiency was used to refer to the actual performance of a learner in a given language, and it involves the mastery of the forms, the linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings of those forms, the capacity to use the language with focus mainly on communication and minimum attention to form, and the creativity in language use (Stern, 1983). Later, Bachman (1990) defined language proficiency as “knowledge, competence, and ability in the use of a language, irrespective of how, where, or under what conditions it has been acquired” (p.16). Hulstijn (2015) defined English language proficiency as “the extent to which an individual possesses the linguistic cognition necessary to function in a given communicative circumstance, in a given modality (listening, speaking, reading, or writing)”.

Analysing the above definitions and aspects of language proficiency in general and English language proficiency in particular, it is argued that English language proficiency is often associated with the ability to perform the language, that is, how a person uses English to communicate effectively in real life. However, when it comes to English language teachers, there is a consensus that language proficiency refers to both their knowledge of the English language and their ability to perform the language as users, analysts, and teachers to both communicate and enact their role as a teacher. This is also the working definition of teachers’ language proficiency adopted for this study.

2.2. EFL teacher’s language proficiency

EFL teachers’ language proficiency is a matter of concern in the literature for non-native English speaking contexts. For instance, Madsen (1983) defines teacher language proficiency as “the overall mastery of a given language, and how well prepared one is to use that language in a particular setting” (p.6). Teachers’ proficiency encompasses general proficiency as well as specific skills and knowledge, including “subject-specific terminology” (Elder, 2001, p.2) and “the discourse competence required for effective classroom delivery of the lesson content”, which are subject to factors such as culture, age, ability, and students’ motivation (Elder & Kim, 2014). According to Freeman et al. (2015), teacher language proficiency is viewed “not as general English proficiency but as a specialized subset of language skills required to prepare and teach lessons”, which is a significant constituent of training English language teachers (p. 129). Likewise, teachers’ language proficiency is “the extent to which an individual possesses the linguistic cognition necessary to function in a given communicative situation, in a given modality (listening, speaking, reading, or writing “linguistic competencies form the core of communicative competence” (Hulstijn, 2011, p. 242). In other words, it refers to teachers’ knowledge of English language systems and their ability to use English to communicate as well. This is also the working definition of teachers’ language proficiency adopted for this study.

EFL teachers' proficiency is seen as one of the key factors contributing to successfully giving instructions as it ensures the provision of a good model of the target language, enables teachers to address the problems learners encounter, and makes teaching more creative (Farrell & Richards, 2007). The level of language proficiency and the ability to teach English in English have become the demand for more qualified English language teachers, especially in English language teaching and learning. Teachers' language proficiency is considered to be attributed to the benefits of teaching English in English (Richard, 2017). The benefits are numerous because teachers can provide valuable language input to their students and serve as language exemplars for them to emulate. Pham (2017) asserts that language teachers' responsibilities and qualities are expected to be standardized and continuously improve because they are an important factor for enhancing students' English proficiency to use it as an international language. Therefore, the language proficiency of teachers in foreign language teaching is a decisive factor affecting teaching and learning quality and quantity because the teacher is not only the linguistic model for students but also provides them with the main source of target language input (Littlewood & Yu, 2011).

2.3. Professional development and teacher professional development

The term *professional development* (PD) may be used in reference to a wide variety of educational and socio-cultural contexts. In the most common sense, professional development enhances a person's learning experiences, which are formal or informal, throughout his/her career life from the starting point of a profession to retirement (Fullan, 2001). In the educational context, professional development is referred to as "a strategy of influence and indirect intervention that works on complex, integrated aspects of teaching; these aspects are idiosyncratic and individual" (Freeman, 1989, p. 40).

Like the term *professional development*, based on different educational and socio-cultural contexts where it is implemented, the term *teacher professional development* (TPD) is studied and presented in many ways. Hoyle (1982) and Glatthorn (1995) see the concepts of teacher professional development differently. Hoyle (1982) firstly defined TPD as "a process in which a teacher continues to develop the knowledge and skills required for effective teaching practices as circumstances change and as new responsibilities are accepted" and secondly as "knowledge acquisition and skill development which should to a greater degree than in the past be more directly related to substantive problems faced by teachers" (p.164). Meanwhile, Glatthorn (1995) drew attention to the fact that teacher professional development aims to address the individual teacher's professional growth and enhancement as well as the school and systemic context. Accordingly, teacher development is a professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of increasingly gaining experiences and examining his or her teaching practices systematically.

When referred to language teaching, professional development is a broader concept and involves the dimensions of personality, morality, and value (Mann, 2005). Language teacher professional development “is a process of articulating an inner world of conscious choices made in response to the outer world of the teaching context” (p. 105). For EFL teachers, the term professional development is mainly associated with activities for enhancing language proficiency and teaching methodology (Freeman, 2017). Considering all the research purposes and context of this study, it is proposed the working definition of TPD for EFL teachers as EFL teacher professional development involves all activities, ranging from formal to informal, which teachers consciously engage in so as to enhance their English language proficiency, both general language proficiency and classroom language proficiency, metalinguistic knowledge of the English language, and methodology about teaching English. Those activities are affected by different social-cultural factors and aim at making the teachers become competent, confident, and comfortable when applying the knowledge and skills they have accumulated into their teaching practice.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research questions

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. *What are the Central Highland high school EFL teachers’ perceptions of the necessity of language proficiency training?*
2. *What is the self-evaluation of their language proficiency after the training (apart from the quantified evaluation- the CEFR-C1 level)?*

3.1. Research design

This study employs the concurrent triangulation strategy, a mixed methods approach, in which the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently but the weight was mainly qualitative method (Creswell, 2009). This strategy allowed the researcher to employ different methods to assess different research questions in an organization, and it could result in well-validated and substantiated findings (Creswell, 2009). In the quantitative dimension, the study used a survey design. The qualitative dimension of the research contained reflective reports and interviews. The adoption of the mixed methods approach helped the researcher tackle the large data set collection and contributed to provide insights into language proficiency perceptions of high school teachers in the Central Highland of Vietnam.

3.2. Participants

A total of 150 high school teachers participated in this study. The male teachers were outnumbered more than five to one by the female teacher participants. They had an average of about 10 years 9.87 years of teaching experience, with a range of 2 to more than 15 years. With reference to academic qualifications, all teacher participants had studied English as a foreign language, 18 teachers (12%) graduated from the Teacher Training College whereas 90 (60%) achieved a Bachelor's degree and the others 42 (28%) held a Master's degree. Half of the participants were key or team leader teachers and the rest were just teachers without any administrative positions in school. Their schools were located in different areas, only 17 out of 63 schools were in or around the city centers of both provinces. Many of them had to travel from 10 to more than 42 km to their school every day. The rate of ethnic minority students in both provinces was quite high, about 26% in Kon Tum 23% in Gia Lai, which was considered a big constraint for teachers teaching them English. Students were at different levels of English within one class. Many of the ethnic minority students could not communicate in Vietnamese language (L1) well, so it was not easy for teachers to cater for all their students' learning needs because of the lack of classroom communication both in English and Vietnamese.

Comment [o1]: Round-up the number

Regarding the number of English language proficiency training workshops that the participants officially took part in, 99 participants (66%) attended one training workshop, 47 participants (31.3%) attended two workshops; 03 (2%) attended three, and only one (0.7%) attended more than three workshops. The training workshops were designed specifically for high school language teachers to develop and achieve at least one higher level of proficiency after the training. Before the training, the teacher trainees took a placement test and were identified to have the CEFR-B2. When the training workshop ended, these participants took part in the exam by the training institutes and they were among the trainees who obtained the CEFR-C1 level. The workshops consisted of both online and onsite types of training, which suggest about 400 guided learning hours to advance from one level of proficiency to the next. The first training workshops started nationwide in the school year 2013-2014, and in Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces in the school year 2016-2017. Different types of teaching materials were adopted by the teacher trainers to help high school language teachers develop their language proficiency. Most of the selected English language textbooks were published by academic publishers and available in Vietnam, such as Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Macmillan, and Pearson. Apart from the existing textbooks by prestige publishers, there were other ones introduced by the teacher trainers at authorized institutes, which was considered to be appropriate for their teacher trainees in their respective teaching contexts.

3.3. Data collection tools

Three main instruments including questionnaires, reflective reports, and interviews were used. These tools are complementary to one another when it comes to research on perceptions (Creswell, 2009).

Questionnaire

The first instrument was the questionnaire. A background questionnaire was used to collect demographic information of the participants. This includes information about gender, age, school location, years of teaching experience, professional qualifications, level of language proficiency, the number of English language proficiency workshops they have attended, the administrative positions at school, and their weekly teaching hours, average number of students in a classroom, and the information of ethnic minority students.

The questionnaire was developed based on Hulstijn (2011) and Freeman's (2016) framework of language proficiency. It consisted of 6 question items (5 Likert scale items and 1 optional question) to investigate the participants' perceptions of the language proficiency trainings, and to assess their self-perceived English language proficiency after the training. Participants responded on a scale from 1 (strongly/totally disagree or not necessary at all) to 5 (strongly/totally agree or very necessary). The data were coded and analyzed with SPSS version 20 to derive the descriptive data. The questionnaire was written in English and had to be answered in English because the target respondents are English teachers. However, any answer in Vietnamese was acceptable due to the respondents' preferences and comfort with using Vietnamese.

Reflective report

Similar to the development of the questionnaire, the reflective report was also developed mainly based on Hulstijn (2011) and Freeman's (2015) framework of language proficiency. The reflective report derived from the questionnaire data, was chosen for the teachers to reflect and report on diverse aspects of their LP since they came back from training workshops. It consisted of four questions to elicit and identify teachers' perceptions of the language proficiency training.

To assess the teachers' perception of the language proficiency training, the reflective report was sent to fifty-eight teachers (37 teachers in Gia Lai and 21 in KonTum), who voluntarily agreed to write a reflective report. They were asked to write about the most valuable things they experienced from the trainings and the changes they perceived in teaching practice after finishing the training workshops. They were also encouraged to elaborate as much as they thought relevant in their responses. **Interview**

Twenty-two teachers participated in the interview which was structured around 4 main questions to elicit and identify the teachers' perception of language proficiency improvement activities. Apart from the major interview questions and depending on the flow of each interview, whenever relevant, questions related to the information provided by the participants in the reflective report were also asked so that the researcher could collect a more insightful

understanding of the perceptions and practices of the participants regarding language proficiency maintenance.

Before the interviews, the participants were asked if they would like to be interviewed in Vietnamese or English. All of them preferred to use Vietnamese. Hence, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese language and recorded for later transcription and analysis. All interviews were voice-recorded. Each participant was interviewed once, and the average length of interviews was 15 minutes, ranging from 8.5 minutes to 20 minutes. To provide quotations of the participants' voices in English, the researcher translated the interview data and interview transcriptions into English.

3.4. Data collection procedure

To obtain the data for the study, the official permission from the DOETs in Gia Lai and Kon Tum was granted before contacting the English language teachers at high schools. After gaining consents from the participants, the survey questionnaire was sent via their email addresses and Zalo account. Later, after collecting and identifying the questionnaire, the reflective report was sent via email with careful instructions and explanations of terms and the deadline of the report to the teachers, who had responded to a subset of question items concerning teachers' perceptions of language proficiency improvement in the questionnaire. The participants were given up to six weeks to complete their report and were also encouraged to elaborate as much as they thought relevant in their responses. The interviews were done on the later stage of the study with those who agreed to participate in the interview stage. The interview questions were also sent to the teachers via email so that the teachers could read them carefully before the interviews were scheduled and conducted.

3.5. Data analysis

A mixed-methods data analysis approach was found to be appropriate for this present study because the reflective report and interview data complemented the questionnaire data (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire data provided high school teachers' perceptions of the national-large scale language proficiency training. The reflective report and interview data provided more insights into the teachers' perceptions of the necessity of language proficiency training. Hence, in this study, two types of data were analyzed.

Firstly, Frequency, Percentage, Standard deviation and Mean scores of the responses to each item on the questionnaire were calculated, using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 20 (IBM Corp, 2011) and Microsoft Office Excel to derive the descriptive data. Referring to the first research question related to teachers' perceptions of the necessity of the training workshops, the Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire was established to check for a satisfactory

level for reliability analysis. According to Taber (2018), if a scale has the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient value of 0.7 or above, it has internal consistency. By statistics, the reliability analysis of the questionnaire was demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.821	13

As seen, the Cronbach Alpha for the 13 items was at .821, which means that the questionnaire scale was reliable. Secondly, data from the opened-ended questions in the questionnaire, reflective report and interview were analyzed qualitatively using the content analysis (e.g. content codes, text, themes, patterns, and interpretation) (Creswell, 2009). This involved creating codes and content qualitatively, then counting the number of times they occur in the text data, and entering carefully into a computer database for data triangulation (Creswell, 2009). Then, results from different sources of data were compared, integrated and interpreted (Morgan, 2014).

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. The EFL teachers’ perceptions of the necessity of the language proficiency training

Data collected from the questionnaire, reflective report and interview first revealed that the language proficiency training workshops were believed to be necessary and helpful for the EFL teachers in the Central Highland of Vietnam since those workshops enhanced their knowledge and skills, and increased their confidence and motivation in teaching practice.

With respect to the necessity of the target language knowledge components to an English language teacher, the teachers were asked to respond to a nine-item questionnaire question by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *not necessary at all (NA)*, 2 *not necessary (NN)*, 3 *not sure (NS)*, *necessary (N)* and 5 *very necessary (VN)*). Their responses are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Necessary Language Proficiency Components to an English Language Teacher

Scales	NA	NN	NS	N	VN	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Listening skills	0	0	1	35	114	4.75	.45
	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	23.3%	76.0%		

2. Reading skills	0	0	0	45	105	4.70	.46
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	70.0%		
3. Speaking skills	0	3	0	28	119	4.75	.56
	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	18.7%	79.3%		
4. Writing skills	0	0	1	53	96	4.63	.50
	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	35.3%	64.0%		
5. Knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology	0	2	2	69	77	4.47	.60
	0.0%	1.3%	1.3%	46.0%	51.4%		
6. Knowledge of Syntax	0	0	8	92	50	4.28	.56
	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	61.3%	33.3%		
7. Knowledge of Semantics	0	0	10	96	44	4.23	.56
	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	64.0%	29.3%		
8. Knowledge of Morphology	1	1	16	94	38	4.11	.66
	0.7%	0.7%	10.7%	62.7%	25.3%		
9. Knowledge of Pragmatics	7	1	15	93	34	3.97	.88
	4.7%	0.7%	10.0%	62.0%	22.7%		

Generally, almost all high school teachers in the Central Highland of Vietnam believed that language proficiency components were strictly necessary to EFL teachers. As can be seen from Table 2, all aspects of language were believed to be necessary for the teachers with the means ranging from 3.97 to 4.75. Specifically, nearly 100% of the teachers confirmed that the four language skills were very necessary or necessary. They expressed a tremendously high level of the tendency when the highest means reached $M = 4.75$ for listening and speaking skills, $M = 4.7$ for reading skills and $M = 4.63$ for writing skills. With regard to the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology, knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics, although the means were slightly smaller than those of the four skills, their necessity was also agreed by the majority of the teachers. For the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology, there were only 2.6 % of the teachers who were not sure about their importance, 97.4% of the rest found them necessary ($M = 4.47$; $SD = .60$). Also, the means at 4.24 and 4.28 showed the same positive tendency though less or more than 10 % of the teachers were unsure about the role of the knowledge of Semantics and Morphology. The lowest mean fell in the last item of the knowledge of Pragmatics with $M = 3.97$

and $SD = .88$. However, even though a small percentage of teachers felt uncertain and unnecessary (15%), most of them (85%) fully advocated the necessity of pragmatics.

Some common explanations for the uncertainty and unnecessary of the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics to an English language teacher are extracted from the open-ended questionnaire question as follows:

Extract 1: "I didn't pay much attention to the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology or Syntax because it was not thoroughly trained in the workshop. I did not explicitly apply it in my teaching".

Extract 2: "My students were not required to do tests about the knowledge of Semantics or Morphology".

Extract 3: "I think the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology, and Pragmatics was not very necessary. I did not remember much of these fields of knowledge, but I rarely did any tests or read any books related to these fields since I left the university".

The result demonstrates that some teachers thought the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics was unnecessary because they were not explicitly trained in the language proficiency training workshops, and were something they rarely revised or applied in their teaching practices. One participant shared that these areas of knowledge were unnecessary since they were not part of evaluation tests for her students. These findings have illustrated how the teachers connected their language proficiency and students' learning outcomes. In the role of EFL language teachers, they tried to their the knowledge and skills (referred to language proficiency) to make good models of English, better respond to students' learning needs, and makes teaching more creative (Farrel & Richards, 2007). This role is likely to make the teachers choose what aspects of the target language knowledge to continuously revise and improve so that they can better transfer to their students. Seeing that students do not need Syntax, Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics knowledge, the teachers underestimated their roles in the language proficiency. In other words, the teachers' perceptions of the importance of language proficiency components can be a result of their responsive pedagogy.

As can be seen, the teachers' positive responses to the 9 items questionnaire question showed their belief that language proficiency components were necessary to an English language teacher. This might be because those teachers used to be English learners who were formally trained all those aspects of ELP thus might strong awareness of all those components.)The result further strengthens the fact that language proficiency does not just involve the actual performance of the language; it also covers the cognitive and linguistic aspect (Bachman, 1990; Stern, 1983). Noticeably, the result reveals that the teachers overestimated the importance of ability to perform the language rather than the ability to know about the language, which may be

explained by the teachers’ roles as language users which focus on the ability in the use of a language in certain situations. This finding aligns with Hulstijn’s (2015) approach to language proficiency.

Secondly, with respect to teachers’ perceptions of the necessity of teachers’ classroom language proficiency, the teachers were asked to indicate the level of the necessity of teachers’ classroom language proficiency by choosing a number from 1 to 5 (with 1 *not necessary at all (NA)*, 2 *not necessary (NN)*, 3 *not sure (NS)*, *necessary (N)* and 5 *very necessary (VN)*) in a four-item cluster. Their responses are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Teachers’ Perceptions of the Necessity of Teachers’ Classroom Language Proficiency

Scales	NA	NN	NS	N	VN	M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Ability to use English to communicate with students effectively	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	48 32%	99 66%	4.63	.55
2. Ability to use English to deliver English lesson contents properly	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	5 3.3%	72 48%	72 48%	4.43	.60
3. Ability to use English properly to assess students and give feedback	1 0.7%	0 0.0%	4 2.7%	66 44%	79 52.7%	4.49	.59
4. Ability to use English to manage classroom properly	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	7 4.7%	73 48.7%	70 46.7%	4.42	.58

As Table 3 suggests, the means of the four items ranging from 4.42 to 4.63 indicate that the teachers’ English classroom language was perceived to be absolutely necessary to EFL teachers in terms of the teaching, pedagogical, instructional, and classroom management functions. To begin with, a high percentage of the teachers (98%) showed a positive perception on the necessity of the teachers’ classroom language proficiency relating to using English to teach English (M = 4.63; SD = .55). Most teachers (97%) also expressed a strong agreement on the teachers’ language classroom use functioning as assessing students and giving feedback (M = 4.49; SD = .59). However, even though a low percentage of teachers felt uncertain (4.7%), most of them (95.3%) fully advocated the necessity of classroom language use enabling them to manage classroom properly (M = 4.42 and SD = .58). Similarly, while there was 96% of the teachers who believed that

language teachers were necessarily using English to convey lesson content, about 4% of them showed their uncertainty about this function ($M = 4.43$ and $SD = .60$).

The triangulation of questionnaire, reflective report, and interview data has illustrated that the teachers found classroom language proficiency necessary to English language teachers. The teachers believed that it was necessary for teachers to maximize the use of English in classroom as a knowledge subject and as a means for classroom communication activities so as to help their students become proficient in English and to meet the student's learning needs. The following accounts from the open-ended questionnaire questions illustrate the points.

Extract 4: "Every day I often start a lesson by asking my students some questions such as "how are you?, how was your weekend?, did you do your homework?, was the homework difficult?" to help them practice speaking English and become confident in communicating in English".

Extract 5: "I tried to use more English to perform classroom tasks such as calling the rolls and asking students to work in pairs, in groups to help the students hear English frequently in classroom".

It is further explained by the teachers in the reflective report and interview as follows.

"I paid attention to use English in long and complex sentences when teaching to motivate students with high level of English proficiency in my class" RF. KT. Teacher 10, Email received date 03.8.2019).

"I used much more English in classroom to help my students communicate better. I tried to motivate my students and create more interactions during classes by designing different classroom activities such as quizzes, games and oral speaking contests" (RF. GL. Teacher 22, Email received date 08.8.2019).

"I designed more pair and group work, and made students use more English in discussion" GL. Teacher 17, Interview 17, 23.11.2019).

"Previously, whenever my students made mistakes in speaking, I immediately stopped them and provided correction. Now I tried to use English to ask my students questions or elicit rules for grammatical structures to help them notice the mistakes and self-correct" GL. Teacher 15, Interview 15, 23.11.2019).

The result shows that the teachers had positive perceptions of the necessity of EFL teachers' classroom language use in dealing with different classroom tasks, which contributed to the development of students' language learning. Different from language proficiency in other contexts, EFL teachers' English proficiency has shown to have a close connection with their competency in using English to foster classroom communication and enhance students' English learning. In such a complex and social context of classrooms, EFL teachers need both general

English proficiency, discourse competence, and specialized language skills (Elder, 2001; Elder & Kim, 2014; Freeman et al., 2015) in order to deliver effective lessons and enact intended pedagogical purposes.

In summary, the results show that the teachers in the central highland had positive perceptions of the necessity of the language proficiency training workshops.

4.2. EFL teachers’ self-evaluation of their English language proficiency after the formal training

The teachers were expected to critically self-evaluate their general language proficiency after having attended the training workshops by responding to a nine-item question numbered from 1 to 9. The teachers responded to the questionnaire question by choosing 1 for *totally disagree* and 5 *totally agree* to show the extent of the improvement of specific language aspects, as illustrated in Table 2. below.

Table 4. Teachers’ Perception of the Improvement in English Language Proficiency

Scales	TD	DA	NS	A	TA	M	SD
Statements	1	2	3	4	5		
1. I believe my speaking improved the most since I came back from the training workshop(s)	0 0%	1 0.7%	5 3.3%	104 69.3%	40 26.7%	4.22	.5 3
2. I believe my listening improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	4 2.7%	6 4.0%	108 72%	32 21.3%	4.12	.5 9
3. My reading improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	8 5.3%	101 67.3%	39 26%	4.18	.5 8
4. My writing improved most since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	8 5.3%	105 70%	35 23.3%	4.15	.5 6
5. My knowledge of Grammar is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0 0.0%	2 1.3%	5 3.3%	105 70%	38 25.3%	4.19	.5 5

6. My knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0	2	17	107	24	4.02	.57
	0.0%	1.3%	11.3%	71.3%	16%		
7. My knowledge of Semantics is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0	6	30	97	17	3.83	.67
	0.0%	4.0%	20%	64.7%	11.3%		
8. My knowledge of Morphology is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0	6	31	96	17	3.83	.67
	0.0%	4.0%	20.7%	64%	11.3%		
9. My knowledge of Pragmatics is most improved since I came back from the training workshop(s).	0	6	32	95	17	3.82	.68
	0.0%	4.0%	21.3%	63.3%	11.3%		

Table 4 suggests that most of the teachers perceived their English language proficiency well improved after leaving the training workshops, with the means ranging from 3.82 to 4.22. Most noticeably, of all the language aspects, 96% and 95.3% of teachers felt speaking skills ($M=4.22$; $SD=.53$) and the knowledge of grammar ($M=4.19$; $SD=.55$) most improved, respectively. The same percentage of the teachers expressed their agreement at a markedly high level that about 93.3% of them found listening skills ($M=4.12$; $SD=.59$), reading skills ($M=4.18$; $SD=.58$) and writing skills ($M=4.15$; $SD=.56$) well improved. The situation was repeated on the knowledge of Phonetics & Phonology when 87.4% of them expressed their strong agreement on the improvement as self-evaluation ($M=4.02$; $SD=.57$). Nearly 13% of the teachers expressed the disagreement and uncertainty about their improvement in this item. Also, the majority of the teachers showed the same strong agreement regarding the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics. Concretely, the improvement was confirmed by a quite high percentage of the teachers 76%, 75% and 75% regarding the knowledge of Semantics ($M=3.83$; $SD=.67$), Morphology ($M=83$; $SD=.67$) and Pragmatics ($M=3.82$; $SD=.68$), respectively. Meanwhile, about 20% of the teachers showed the uncertainty and only 4% expressed the disagreement in each language aspect regarding the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics.

Before the training, the teacher participants took a placement test and were identified to have the CEFR-B2. When the training workshop ended, these participants took part in the exam by the training institutes and all the trainees obtained the CEFR-C1 level. The participants' open-ended responses to the questionnaire question "what skills and knowledge do you feel has been the

most improved since you took part in the English language training workshop(s)", and the interview questions "what is the level of language proficiency you achieved before attending the training course (s)?" and "what area(s) do you feel most improved (knowledge and skills) when you took part in the English language training workshop (s)?" yielded interesting and constant responses in Kon Tum and Gia Lai provinces. Some of the following accounts represent the point.

"After the training, I reached C1 level. I found my language skills and knowledge of grammar and vocabulary well improved. I did not think about the knowledge of Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics improved much. I took advantage of the training to study hard, which boosted my English language proficiency and enhance my teaching quality" (KT. Teacher 01, Interview 01, 05.10.2019).

"My language proficiency level was well improved. I could see all knowledge and skills increase, specifically Speaking and Listening because we used all English during the training and frequently used English in my teaching practice" (KT. Teacher 07, Interview 07, 12.10.2019).

"My English proficiency increased one level after the training. I focused much on doing practice tests, practicing English with the teacher trainers and with peers, so I could improve all skills and the knowledge of grammar and phonetics and phonology" (KT. Teacher 04, Interview 04, 10.10.2019).

"My English skills and the knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology improved well after the training because I spent much time self-studying online and applied all I learned into my teaching practice" (GL. Teacher 19, Interview 19, 24.11.2019).

The results indicate that apart from the quantified evaluation-the CEFR-C1 level, the teachers believed that their knowledge and skills in English were well improved after the training workshop(s). This was because the teachers believed that they spent time for self-studying and made great efforts to frequently use English both inside and outside the classroom. The training workshops provided many opportunities for teachers to reflect on their proficiency, considered how their proficiency improve over the training workshops, and allowed them to acquire the language attentively. Although only few of them noticed little improvement in certain knowledge and skills (i.e. the knowledge of Syntax, Semantics, Morphology and Pragmatics), their English language knowledge and skills were believed to be well improved after attending the training workshops.

Noticeably, the training workshops were believed to help the teachers become more confident and motivated. The teachers expressed their satisfaction about getting a good chance to attend the training workshops and thanks for that they could use English in classroom more frequently and confidently. The teachers reported that they had more opportunities to practice using English

than they used to be at their teaching contexts, which was considered most valuable. This can be seen in the following interview accounts:

“After the training, I felt so much proud of myself and more confident when teaching my students.” (GL. Teacher 21, Interview 21, 27.11.2019).

“I felt very happy and proud of myself because I could achieve the standard level of proficiency, which required me a lot of efforts.” (GL. Teacher 17, Interview 17, 23.11.2019).

“I felt more confident in helping my 12th grade students do the national examination tests. Particularly, I could apply many useful strategies to help them do the reading texts, which I learned from the trainers and colleagues during the training. Interestingly, I loved my teaching more because I felt I know how to manage my lessons.” (GL. Teacher 01, Interview 01, 05.10.2019).

“It seemed that teaching was easier and more interesting since I came back from the training. I had learned something new and tried to apply new things in my teaching.” (KT. Teacher 03, Interview 03, 05.10.2019).

The result shows that since leaving the formal training workshop(s), the teachers felt happy and proud of themselves because they could achieve the language proficiency standard requirement. Specifically, they felt more confident and motivated in their teaching practice thanks to the language proficiency training workshops they had participated in. This finding is further supported by researchers (e.g. Freeman, 2017; Fullan, 2001; Mann, 2005) who found a close relationship between the role of continual formal training on in-service teachers’ professional development. The teachers believed that the language proficiency training workshop provided them with opportunities to frequently practice four language skills during the training and speak English with the teacher trainers and colleagues. It seems that in response to the experiences they gained from the training (outside world), the teachers’ inner world changed consciously which made them change their teaching practices, which reflects part of language teacher professional development (Mann, 2005).

The language proficiency trainings that were carefully considered and planned for to emphasize the development of higher levels of English language proficiency for the teachers in the Central Highland were of substantial benefits for them. Indeed, in the context of foreign language teaching, teachers’ subject knowledge and teachers’ language classroom proficiency are indispensable ingredients for successful teaching (Richards et al., 2013). Specifically, in a non-speaking English context like Vietnam, which uses CEFR as a benchmark for their EFL teachers’ proficiency (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015, p. 47-48), that language teachers fully met the national standard of EFL teachers and master English language knowledge and skills after finishing formal training workshops is highly helpful and appreciated.

In the case of high school teachers in the Central Highland of Vietnam, possessing a positive perception of the necessity of EFL teachers' language proficiency and perceiving confidence and motivation in teaching practice after leaving the training is very encouraging and inspiring, which may affect the way teachers teach to promote students' language development and create more effective teaching environment (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Schutz & Lee, 2014). At least the immersion of teachers' English classroom language discourse to organize classroom activities is a feature of communicative language teaching, creating opportunities for students to interact with their teacher and their peers in English (Richards et al., 2013, p. 234). Especially those whose English language knowledge and skills, and level of proficiency well improved after the proficiency training are more likely to contribute to improve teachers' teaching practices and students' learning English quality. This is stated by research (e.g. Pham, 2017, Richards, 2007; Valmori, 2014) that language proficiency can increase the flexibility of EFL teachers' classroom practices and promote EFL students' learning qualities.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study draws a conclusion that high school language teachers in the Central Highland of Vietnam were highly aware of the necessity of the language proficiency training, which is indispensable to their professionalism. The design and organization of language proficiency improvement activities including components of improving the target language and pedagogical skills are decisive factors affecting the quality of English language proficiency of EFL teachers. As a result, the training workshops are believed to help the teachers increase their level of language proficiency and enhance their language knowledge and pedagogical skills. The training also contributed to enhancing the teachers' confidence and motivation in teaching. Therefore, there needs to develop the necessity and importance of English language proficiency training for language teachers, specifically the improvement of quality of English language input. That is because the language proficiency of teachers in foreign language teaching context plays a critical role. The teacher is not only the linguistic model for students (Littlewood & Yu, 2011) but also the only source of giving appropriate and accurate models of English language, and providing precise English language for students in the classroom (Richards et al., 2013). Moreover, helping EFL teachers sustain their professional standard and improving the quality of teaching and learning a foreign language require a tremendous effort and a long-term coherent policy not only from the policy-making national level but the policy-implementing at the local level. In other words, language teachers need teacher professional development as post-training activities to help them improve and maintain the achieved level of proficiency. It would be necessary that authorized institutes, Departments of Education and Training and school leaders provide

language teachers with follow-up language maintenance activities as part of the training curriculum.

The study has some limitations, which, in turn, provide some suggestions for further research. First, this study focused only on EFL teachers in the Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces. As such, future studies might need to delve into other teachers' perceptions of language proficiency training workshops from other cities or provinces. Second, only some aspects of language proficiency training workshops were explored in this study, with a limited number of participants. Future research can expand this line of inquiry. Developing or adapting a more comprehensive questionnaire, reflective report and interview, and validating the instruments with a large number of random samples of participants can boost the validity and reliability of the instruments and findings. Likewise, in-depth case studies of teachers can also shed more light on the impacts of language proficiency training on EFL teachers.

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Reliability Statistics of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.821	13

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Q1.1	53.13	16.595	.499	.808
Q1.2	53.18	16.484	.514	.807
Q1.3	53.13	16.205	.471	.809
Q1.4	53.25	16.456	.474	.809
Q1.5	53.41	15.693	.541	.803
Q1.6	53.60	15.745	.579	.801
Q1.7	53.65	15.678	.595	.799
Q1.8	53.77	15.885	.436	.812
Q1.9	53.91	16.568	.177	.846
Q3.1	53.25	16.160	.489	.807
Q3.2	53.45	15.792	.522	.804
Q3.3	53.39	15.811	.526	.804
Q3.4	53.46	16.210	.441	.811