EFL Prospective Teachers' English Language Proficiency Development:
A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine English language proficiency development among EFL prospective teachers during their four-year study at the faculty of education. A sample of sixty six college EFL prospective teachers took part in the study. The Examination for the Michigan Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE) was first administered to participants in the academic year 2017 when they got enrolled as freshmen at the Faculty of Education, Kafr El-Sheikh University. Later on, participants took the same examination before their graduation in 2020. Data were statistically analyzed using Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) Statistics, version 18 to investigate the impact of English prospective teachers' academic preparation on their language proficiency as well as the relationship between their English language scores on the General Secondary Certificate (G.S.C.) Exam and overall proficiency after a specialized study at university. Results indicated that EFL prospective teachers' overall language proficiency level in English was improved. However, some proficiency components such as grammar and vocabulary were not developed. Moreover, there was no relationship between the scores they obtained on the G.S.C. Exam and their language proficiency level in English. Interpretation of results was provided and recommendations were suggested.

Keywords: language proficiency, achievement, academic preparation, language development, longitudinal studies

Introduction:

In Egypt, a prospective teacher of English is prepared according to the integrative model. Consequently, EFL prospective teachers study a set of educational, professional, general knowledge and academic courses in parallel during their four-year preparation in the faculties of education. There is a widely-spread claim that the integrative model of teachers' preparation renders an academically weak product. In other words, the load and focus on non-academic courses in the faculties of education may affect EFL undergraduates' English language proficiency level.

The construct of language proficiency is not easy to define. Its components are also argumentative and diverse. Whereas some linguists linked language proficiency to learners' pronunciation and grammar, others drew the attention to such other language proficiency aspects as lexical knowledge and the pragmatic ability to employ language appropriately in different situations. Moreover, there is a debate about whether language proficiency is implicit – in the sense that it involves the needed knowledge to produce fluent and spontaneous language – or explicit, so it can be directly tested in traditional exams (Ellis, 2015).

Regarded to be an attained skill rather than a method, language proficiency refers to "the ability of an individual to use culturally-appropriate language to communicate spontaneously in non-rephrased contexts." (Shabani-Jadidi, 2020: 320). Besides, language proficiency is a person's skill of employing language to listen, speak, read and write in real-life situations.

Hulstijn (2015) classified the components of language proficiency into core and peripheral. On one hand, the core components of language proficiency include linguistic cognition of phonetics and phonology. On the other hand, the peripheral components of language proficiency encompass the metacognitive knowledge of a language. The current study focused on the language proficiency components identified in the Examination for the Michigan Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE): grammar, cloze, vocabulary and reading.

Examining the relationship between students' English language proficiency skills and academic performance, Rudd and Honkiss (2020) made their study on a massive sample of 2026 students at a private university in the surrounding areas of Bangkok. Statistically, t-test and Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis were utilized. The attained results uncovered a development in students' proficiency levels due to their higher academic preparation at university. In addition, a positive relationship between English language proficiency and GPA attainment was found.

Mohammed and Salih (2019) attempted to find the causes of Sudanese university students' low English language proficiency level and the suggested solutions to overcome such causes. Participants in the study were 180 subjects, and an unstructured questionnaire was used as a tool to collect the needed data for the study. Findings revealed that there were a number of factors caused Sudanese university students' low level of English language; namely, context, teachers, general education, curriculum, and the students themselves. The suggested solutions

included reevaluating the general goals of teaching and learning English language, teacher's preparation, curricula review, and enhancing students' motivation.

Being interested in probing the factors influencing English language proficiency in China, Yuntao (2019) investigated 300 non-English major university students' perception of such factors. A survey was used to collect data. It was found that language learning motivation and learning strategies had the most significant impact on English language proficiency. In addition, there was a positive relationship between the duration of English language learning and proficiency.

In the Indonesian context, Alfian (2018) studied the relation between language proficiency level and EFL learners' language learning strategy choice at an Islamic university. A large number of participants – 284 learners – were classified according to their proficiency into three levels: high, medium and low. Results referred to the presence of a linear relationship between proficiency level and strategy use. It was concluded that the higher the proficiency level, the higher the number of strategies employed. Moreover, higher proficiency level learners tended to choose such meta-cognitive strategies as conscientious planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning. On the other extreme, low proficiency level learners were inclined to select affective strategies. That is to say that they focused on the emotional requirements such as confidence.

Fukuda (2017) explored the relationship between learners' self-regulated language learning and proficiency. In addition, he examined the differences in characteristics of self-regulated learning between low and

high proficiency learners. Ninety seven Japanese university students specialized in English participated in the study. The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) was administered online to measure their self-regulated learning skills.   As for proficiency, they took the TOEIC test. In terms of statistics, multiple regressions and t-tests were used. It was found that metacognitive strategies, effort regulation and coping with problems significantly predicted the variance in learners' proficiency. No motivational factors were found related to its prediction. Significant differences in self-regulated learning between low and high proficiency learners were found in: self-efficacy, intrinsic goal orientation, test anxiety, metacognitive strategies, effort regulation and coping with problems. It was suggested that motivational factors were indirectly, yet, evidently related to English language proficiency level.

Aiming at investigating the relationship between English Language Teaching (ELT) learners' perceptions of learners' autonomy and ELT learners' proficiency level in language learning, Ünal, Çeliköz and Sarı (2017) selected 326 Turkish learners in 10 different classes to carry out their study. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 23 years old. They were of different levels varying from beginner, elementary, intermediate, high intermediate and advanced. The American Language Placement Test (ALCPT) was administered to determine learners' proficiency levels. The study was implemented at a university. Statistically, the researchers used One-Way ANAVO and Cronbach's Alpha with the help of SPSS, version 22. The obtained results indicated that there was not a significant difference between learners' autonomy

perceptions and their proficiency levels. However, there were significant differences in such constructs as technical perspectives, benefits of learners' autonomy to language learning, teacher's role in promoting autonomy and proficiency.

Cing and Ladion (2014) attempted to identify teachers' English language proficiency levels, teaching efficacy levels and effectiveness in teaching grammar. Moreover, they sought finding correlations between proficiency and efficacy on one hand and teachers' age, civil status and teaching experience on the other hand. Results confirmed the relationship between language proficiency and teaching efficacy. Furthermore, the factors of age, civil status and teaching experience contributed to proficiency and efficacy as well. Such recommendations as encouraging teachers to develop their language proficiency were provided.

Having a large number of participants: 208 subjects, Lee (2012) conducted a study in which he investigated the relationship between English language proficiency and several variables. Three instruments were employed: a questionnaire for measuring attitudes towards an English-only teaching approach, proficiency measures in Korean and English and a vocabulary knowledge test. Statistically, regression analysis was used. Korean proficiency, vocabulary knowledge and the amount of understandable English instruction were strongly predictive of participants' English language proficiency. However, learners' attitudes towards the English-only approach had little relation to English language proficiency. The results of the questionnaire matched those attained by the other tools showing that EFL learners' attitudes towards the investigated

approach were rather negative. Thus, the recent movement towards bilingualism; i.e., using both the mother tongue side by side with the target language in the classroom; was recommended.

Comparing both variables in different languages, Shneyderman and Abella (2009) explored the effects of a two-way immersion bilingual program on language proficiency and achievement over a period of four academic years. Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) techniques and multivariate matching algorithms were employed. An improvement was found in reading comprehension. The study concluded that bilingual programs had a positive effect on both proficiency levels and achievement among non-native speakers of English.

A closely related study was made by El-Banna (1990) investigating language proficiency levels among student teachers in five Egyptian colleges of education. He administered a language proficiency test to 932 participants (347 male and 585 female). Results rendered a significant difference between college students' proficiency levels and their instructional levels. However, gender had no significant impact on their language proficiency. Recommendations included the necessity of improving EFL student teachers' English preparation. Regional faculties of education are encouraged to select better qualified applicants and not practice open admissions. Furthermore, policy makers were invited to ensure the quality and quantity of the courses offered to this population.

The Study Problem

Out of the researcher's informal interviews with lecturers and prospective teachers, she induced the obvious deterioration of English

majors' language proficiency levels despite their condensed academic preparation. Furthermore, the researcher's own teaching experience rendered the same belief of EFL prospective teachers' deteriorated language proficiency levels. Besides, the researcher reviewed prospective teachers' official exam results throughout their study years at the Faculty of Education. These results also gave a strong indication that EFL prospective teachers' language proficiency levels did not meet the desired expectations. Attempting to confirm such observations and opinions on an academic basis, the researcher identified the problem of the current study as the EFL prospective teachers' disappointing language proficiency levels despite their four-year condensed academic preparation. In addition, the General Secondary Certificate (G. S. C.) English language score as a reliable criterion that indicates EFL prospective teachers' language proficiency levels was questioned. To elaborate the problem, the following main question was raised:

Does EFL prospective teachers' four-year academic preparation develop their proficiency levels in English?

The following five sub-questions branched off:

1 – Does EFL prospective teachers' four-year academic preparation develop their grammar proficiency in English?

2 – Does EFL prospective teachers' four-year academic preparation develop their reading cloze proficiency in English?

3 – Does EFL prospective teachers' four-year academic preparation develop their vocabulary proficiency in English?

4 – Does EFL prospective teachers' four-year academic preparation develop their reading proficiency in English?

5 – Does EFL prospective teachers' four-year academic preparation develop their overall proficiency in English?

6 – Is there a relationship between EFL prospective teachers' G.S.C. score and their language proficiency level in English?

Hypotheses

Based on the study questions, the following five hypotheses were formulated to be tested:

1 – There is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' grammar proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

2 – There is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' reading cloze proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

3 – There is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' vocabulary proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

4 – There is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' reading proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

5 – There is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' overall proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

6 – There is no relationship between EFL prospective teachers' G.S.C. score and their language proficiency level in English.

Method
Participants

In 2017, the researcher had an access to 114 participants enrolled in the First Year, English General Education Department at the Faculty of Education, Kafr El-Sheikh University. The Examination for the Michigan Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE) was administered to those participants. In 2020, only sixty-six out of the 114 took the same test in the post administration. Therefore, the sixty-six subjects represented the sample for this study. Participants were almost eighteen years old on administering the pretest and twenty-two at the posttest administration. At the beginning of the experiment, they have studied English for eleven years. At the end of the experiment, they have finished their specialized four-year academic study at the Faculty of Education.

Instruments

To collect data for the current study, the researcher employed the Examination for the Michigan Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE). The exam kit included five test versions with their answer keys. The researcher randomly selected Version Four for the current study, since the reliability and validity of all test versions were already proven by their author. The test had thirty-five objective questions: ten on grammar, ten on reading cloze, ten on vocabulary and five on reading. The allotted time to administering the test was half an hour. Instructions and sample examples were given in a written form to participants before the test administration.

Grammar, vocabulary and reading were measured by multiple-choice questions, whereas the reading cloze had the typical fill-in-the-space question form. The Answer Key devoted a score per item, consequently, the total score of the test was 35. The interpretation of the test scores were based on the criteria determined by Harris (1969) as follows:

Table 1

Scoring Rubrics of the English Language Proficiency Test

Test Scores	Proficiency Level
0 - 17	Poor
18 - 20	Average
21 - 29	Good
30 - 35	Excellent

Participants' G.S.C. scores in English were collected from their official files so that the relationship between those scores and their English language proficiency could be investigated as well.

Procedure

The study at hand followed the one-group pre-posttest experimental design. Participants were given the proficiency test as soon as they were enrolled in the First Year, English Department at the Faculty of Education, Kafr El-Sheikh University. They have been studying academic specialized courses during their four-year preparation at the faculty. The English language proficiency test was post administered to the same group (n = 66) after three years when they were about to graduate from college. The results of both administrations were compared so that the impact of EFL prospective teachers' academic

preparation on their language proficiency level in English can be determined.

Results

Depending on their nature, the first five hypotheses were statistically tested by Paired Samples t-Test, whereas the sixth hypothesis was tested by calculating the correlation coefficient between G.S.C. scores and language proficiency levels. Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) Statistics 18 software (2009) was utilized to analyze data. The following results were attained:

Hypothesis One

It was supposed that there is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' grammar proficiency scores on the pre-posttest. Before applying Paired Samples t-Test, the researcher tested skewness as a precondition:

Table 2

Skewness of Grammar Scores

		t	st
	Missing	0	0
	Skewness	-.002	.021

Since the skewness values -.002 and .021 are greater than -3 and less than 3, Paired Samples t-Test can be safely applied.

Inputting the grammar pre-posttest scores into the PASW Statistics 18 software (2009), and performing the Paired Samples t-Test; the following result was obtained:

Table 3

Paired Samples t-Test on Grammar

			Differences			
		Paired Differ	95% Confidence Interval Differenc			
	Std. Dev	Std. Error				
				l		

Results rendered an obtained t that equaled .822. Reviewing the statistical tables, it was found that the critical value of t, when the degree of freedom is 65 and the significance level is .05, equals 1.671. Since the obtained t is less than the critical one, the first null hypothesis is accepted. In other words, there is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' grammar proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis assumed that there is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' reading cloze proficiency scores on the pre-posttest. Skewness had to be tested before applying the Paired Samples t-Test:

Table 4

Skewness of Reading Cloze Scores

		Pretest	Posttest
		66	66
	N	0	0
	Sk	-.391	.059

The skewness of reading cloze scores were $\geq$ -3 and $\leq$ 3. This indicated the possibility of performing the Paired Samples t-Test. The same steps taken in Hypothesis One were followed. The following results were rendered:

Table 5

Paired Samples t-Test on Reading Cloze

Paired Differences			Paired Differences		*t*	df
			95% Confidence Interval of Difference			
Mean	Std. Devia	Std. Error M	Lower	Upper		
					3.08	65
.742	1.956	.241	.262	1.223		

The calculated t equaled 3.084. Comparing this value with the value of critical t, when the degree of freedom is 65 and the significance level is .05, it was found that the calculated t was greater than the critical one 1.671. This entailed rejecting the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is a significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' reading cloze proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

Hypothesis Three

Concerning vocabulary, the third null hypothesis assumed that there is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' vocabulary proficiency scores on the pre-posttest. As a precondition of the t-Test, the researcher calculated skewness as shown in Table (6):

Table 6

Skewness of Vocabulary Scores

		Pretest	Posttest
		66	66
	M	0	0
	Ske	.189	.295

Vocabulary scores had a skewness of .189 for the pretest, and .295 for the posttest. The skewness values were $\geq$ -3 and $\leq$ 3. Thus, the Paired Samples t-Test could be safely performed as follows:

Table 7

Paired Samples t-Test on Vocabulary

	Paired Differences			Paired Differences		t	df
				95% Confidence Interval of Difference			
Mean	Std. Devia	Std. Error M		Lower	Upper	.15	65
.030	1.626	.200		-.370	.430		

The statistical analysis showed that the calculated t was .151. When the degree of freedom is 65 and the significance level is .05, the critical t is 1.671. Therefore, the calculated t was less than the critical one. Accordingly, the third null hypothesis was accepted: there is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' vocabulary proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

Hypothesis Four

The fourth hypothesis handled reading proficiency. It supposed that there is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' reading proficiency scores on the pre-posttest. Skewness was first calculated so that the conditions of applying the Paired Samples t-Test were achieved as illustrated in Table (8).

Table 8

Skewness of Reading Scores

		Pretest	Posttest
		66	66
	M	0	0
	Ske	.639	.252

The attained values of skewness were .639 for the pretest and .252 for the posttest. These values were ≥ -3 and ≤ 3, therefore, it was statistically allowed to use the Paired Samples t-Test.

Table 9

Paired Samples t-Test on Reading

	Paired Differences			Paired Differences		t	df
				95% Confidence Interval of Difference			
Mean	Std. Devia	Std. Error M		Lower	Upper	2.75	65
.485	1.428	.176		.134	.836		

Using PASW Statistics 18 software (2009), the Paired Samples t-Test was calculated. The obtained t was 2.759. At a degree of freedom of 65 and a significance level of .05, the critical t is 1.671. Since the calculated t was greater than the critical one, the fourth null hypothesis was rejected: there is a significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' reading proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

Hypothesis Five

EFL prospective teachers' overall proficiency was investigated in the fifth hypothesis that read: there is no significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' overall language proficiency scores on the pre-posttest. Using the same adopted procedures in the previous hypotheses, skewness was calculated (See Table 10):

Table 10

Skewness of Overall Language Proficiency Scores

		Pretest	Posttest
		66	66
	M	0	0
	Ske	.274	.002

The obtained values of skewness were $\geq$ -3 and $\leq$ 3. Thus, it was appropriate to use the Paired Samples t-Test.

Table 11

Paired Samples t-Test on Overall Language Proficiency

Paired Differences			Paired Differences		*t*	df
Mean	Std. Devia	Std. Error M	95% Confidence Interval of Difference			
			Lower	Upper	2.50	65
1.015	3.293	.405	.206	1.825		

The statistical analysis of overall language proficiency rendered an obtained t of 2.504. Compared to the critical value of t (1.671) when the degree of freedom is 65, it was found that the obtained t was greater than the critical one. This result entailed rejecting the null hypothesis. Consequently, it was concluded that there is a significant difference between EFL prospective teachers' overall language proficiency scores on the pre-posttest.

However, it is noteworthy to mention that the EFL prospective teachers' language proficiency levels were not mainly satisfying both before and after their four-year academic study in college. The following table provides an insight about EFL prospective teachers' language proficiency levels on the pre-posttest according to Harris' (1969) criteria:

Table 12

EFL Prospective Teachers' Language Proficiency Levels on the Pre-posttest

Proficiency Level	Pretest	Posttest
Poor	92.4%	91%
Average	6.1%	9%
Good	1.5%	0%

On administering the pretest, 92.4% of participants had a poor level of language proficiency, whereas 6.1% possessed an average level of language proficiency. A minority of 1.5% of EFL prospective teachers held a good level of language proficiency. After three years of college

academic preparation, the percentage of poor language proficiency participants decreased to 91% and that of average proficiency participants increased to 9%. But, neither good nor excellent language proficiency levels were attained.

Hypothesis Six

The relationship between EFL prospective teachers' English score on the G.S.C. Exam and their overall language proficiency level after finishing their four-year study at university was probed in Hypothesis Six. The convenient statistical technique to test this hypothesis was Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Results showed that the correlation coefficient between both variables was -.055. The significant value of the coefficient for a two-tailed test is .659. This means that the relationship between participants' the G.S.C Exam and their overall language proficiency level was negative, extremely weak and insignificant. Accordingly, the null hypothesis which states that there is no relationship between EFL prospective teachers' G.S.C. score and their language proficiency in English was accepted.

Discussion

English language proficiency among EFL prospective teachers was propped on both the general and specific levels. Each component of language proficiency was investigated to find out whether college study had led to its development. The obtained results were varied and implied fruitful interpretations.

Grammar was not developed significantly among EFL prospective teachers. One probable reason behind that might be the insufficiency

of explicit grammar courses they had studied in college. According to the current Faculty of Education, Kafr El-Sheikh University Bylaw, EFL prospective teachers study two grammar courses only during the first and the second year. The last two years are "grammar-free". Consequently, the lack of exposure and refreshing grammatical information might lead to graduates with low grammar proficiency.

Another potential cause of grammar undevelopment among EFL prospective teachers is believed to be the nature of the two courses they studied at college. These courses included teaching theoretical grammar rather than practical structure. Prospective teachers were preoccupied with grammatical terms, branches and components rather than the usage needed for building sound forms of spoken and written language. Cintrón-Valentín, García-Amaya and Ellis (2019) faced specific difficulties in developing some grammatical structures among university students. However, they found positive effects of captioning through animated videos on other grammatical form production.

This result contradicts with that obtained by Köksal and Ulum (2019) as they found that grammar was developed among Turkish in-service EFL teachers due to what they had studied during their preparation in university. However, the implications and recommendations they provided can offer solutions to the Egyptian context in general. A crucial recommendation was about the selection and aptitude university exams. Policy makers were invited to improve the validity of such exams. They also suggested that English departments should be more aware of the new students' problems and drawbacks. Accordingly, remedial courses and programs can be provided. Even

secondary school programs need to be rearranged to cure students' language proficiency weaknesses.

The second investigated language proficiency component was a reading cloze. Reading cloze has something to do with reading comprehension and word choice skills. An improvement among EFL prospective teachers' reading cloze skill was detected. The researcher attributes that improvement to the fact that most courses prospective teachers study involve reading and writing either explicitly or implicitly. For instance, novel and drama courses require a great deal of reading.

The obtained results were not consisted with what Sadeghi (2014) believed. He argued that all reading cloze procedures: phrase cloze, classical cloze and standard cloze for testing reading comprehension were all aimless types of tests. According to his view point, research should depend on the results of high-stakes international tests rather than vague reading cloze procedures. Moreover, the current study results also were not in agreement with those provided by Alimorad (2014) as she asserted that university students' performance on reading cloze tests was not affected by relevance to the field depending subjects.

Another unexpected result in the current study was related to vocabulary. EFL prospective teachers did not develop an adequate level of vocabulary proficiency. The researcher believes that this inadequate vocabulary may be logical in the light of the shift from pre-university explicit vocabulary teaching to college implicit vocabulary acquisition. In other words, students from kindergarten to secondary

school get accustomed to keep new words by heart and have direct questions that ask for word meaning. Nevertheless, neither college preparation courses nor their final exams have apparent emphasis on vocabulary learning. This justification was supported by Pauwels (2018) who confirmed the importance of the intentional study of vocabulary. The results he presented revealed that neither timing nor overall approach were significant in vocabulary development. He also asserted the popularity and benefits of vocabulary list learning.

Vocabulary size and depth were significantly linked to students with lower-intermediate proficiency whereas size and depth dimensions had a moderate association for the upper-intermediate proficiency level students. Those with advanced proficiency levels showed no significant changes in their vocabulary size or depth. The implications of these findings had something to do with vocabulary depth instruction in college. It was suggested that instructors, test developers, and material designers should incorporate the dimension of word associations into the construct of word knowledge (Enayat & Amirian, 2020).

Ghobain (2020) had a partial disagreement with Pauwels (2018). She concluded that college learners did need teachers' guidance for learning specialized vocabulary. However, they could promote a reasonable autonomy level for Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition (IVA). In the same year, Wang and Yang (2020) drew attention to the fact that vocabulary development might also be affected by the item learning type. They concluded that learning new words in collocations yielded better retention and development than learning them in

isolation. On the same track, Ong, Maramara, Vacalares, Zambas and Marie (2019) studied vocabulary development among university students. They found that the vocabulary skills development often occurred at the beginning of the lesson. In few exceptions, it was done at the middle of the lesson. They highlighted the role of context clues in vocabulary acquisition.

In respect of reading proficiency, the current study indicated a development among EFL prospective teachers after their four-year study at college. The researcher believes that the reading development occurred due to the nature and requirements of the courses in the English Department. All literary courses fostered reading. Even linguistic courses are served theoretically; i. e., students had to practice a lot of reading in these courses as well. This finding coincided with Tschirner's (2016) as he concluded that college majors could attain advanced levels of reading proficiency at graduation. He also remarked that there was a kind of disconnection between listening and reading proficiency at higher education.

Linking reading proficiency to university students' reading attitudes and reading strategies, Kim (2016) came to an end that there was a kind of discomfort linked to students' proficiency levels. He added that metacognitive reading strategy was found to increase reading proficiency. Comfort and intellectual values were also associated with this reading strategy. Quite different results were attained by Gönen (2015). Despite no significant relationship between FL reading strategies and proficiency was found, college students with low and

high reading proficiency levels were different in their awareness and employing of certain reading strategies.

Although some components were not significantly developed, overall language proficiency improved among EFL prospective teachers. One potential reason behind this improvement might be the plenty of novel and drama courses in the English Department Program. Mirza (2020) asserted that storytelling in general could improve university students' language proficiency. She added that storytelling is enjoyable and educational. Besides, it improves specific components like pronunciation and storytelling social aspect.

In his massive needs analysis that was determined to enhance English language proficiency at Mexican universities, Garcia-Ponce (2020) classified the language proficiency components needed for practicing different careers. In respect of English language teaching, university authorities, staff members and EFL prospective teachers selected the following language proficiency components as the most needed ones for the profession: high speaking, reading and writing skills and abilities to perform activities in English related to EFL teaching. It was believed that not all language proficiency ingredients were needed for effective teaching.

Hitting an important nail on the head, Horák and Gandini (2019) handled the transfer of a paper-based English language proficiency to an online platform. They supposed that language learners' language proficiency was developed due to the merits of online immediate assessment and feedback. Linking this to the current study results, a sort of agreement is found as the current participants witnessed a shift

in the educational forms for a whole year because of the crisis imposed by COVID-19 pandemic.

Probing into the probable effects of demographic and psychological factors on ESL students' language proficiency, Serquina and Batang (2018) concluded that such factors as age, sex, curriculum, household average years of schooling, nature of occupation of parents and motivation had no effect on students' English language proficiency. Nonetheless household aggregate income was found to have a great effect on students' language proficiency as it raised their anxiety.

A quite different perspective was handled by Freeman (2017) who considered the conventional definitions of language proficiency that depend on language use to be far from English teachers' real needs in their professional life. He suggested an "English-for-Teaching" proficiency concept that is based on language for specific purposes. Language proficiency according to this concept has three components: classroom management, understanding and communicating a lesson and students' assessments and feedback. The same view point was held by El-Banna (1987) as he recommended that all EFL prospective teachers should receive a formal training, with the assertion that faculties of education have to make sure that their graduates have specific language competencies before being allowed to teach.

Two years later, the same author El-Banna (1989) investigated language proficiency levels among EFL university students linking them to language anxiety and gender. His findings might render a logical explanation of the reasons behind overall language proficiency development depicted in the current study. El-Banna (1989) drew

attention to the impact of gender on language proficiency levels. Moreover, an inverse relationship was found between language anxiety and language proficiency level. In the current study, the majority of participants were females. In addition, the researcher pointed out that the test had nothing to do with prospective teachers' formal evaluation, so they were not stressed during administration.

The last result attained in this study was the irrelevance between EFL prospective teachers' G.S.C. score and their language proficiency in English. The clear induction of this result is that G. S. C. programs and assessment systems do not necessarily guarantee a high level of language proficiency. This result is not consistent with those obtained by Grisso (2018), Mojica (2013) who found a strong relationship between English language learners' achievement and language proficiency levels. However, this result coincided with those obtained such researchers as Dev and Qiqieh (2016).

The relationship between EFL teachers' language proficiency and their professional competence was investigated by Tsang (2017). It was reported that teachers' overall language proficiency played an important role in ELT classrooms. Nonetheless, this role faded once a language proficiency threshold was met. Consequently, Tsang (2017) argued that the focus of EFL teachers' preparation should consider other contributive factors to teaching effectiveness other than language proficiency.

Achievement should not be associated with language proficiency, because learners' achievement is an outcome of pedagogical endeavor, while their language proficiency standards are a product of

accumulated experiences, educational policies and practices outside the borders of the curriculum (Stoneberg, 2015).

Some programmatic practices were found crucial to develop English learners' language proficiency and academic achievement alike. Clear goals for effective program implementation had to be set. Curriculum alignment in the sense that it satisfied learners' needs had to be taken into account. Teachers' and lecturers' continuous professional development obviously affected learners' language proficiency and achievement. Furthermore, strategic processes for monitoring and assessing students' progress in language proficiency skills and academic achievement were decisive as well (Hopes, 2014).

In 2010, Wongtrirat reported varied and rather controversial results on investigating the relation between language proficiency and achievement in the studies made between 1987 and 2009. The basic induction he came up with was that language proficiency tests had little predictive ability on GPA and course completion of international students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. His findings were useful for university administrators and academic departments in charge of admissions decisions for international students.

The current researcher attributes the disconnection between G. S. C. achievement and language proficiency level to EFL prospective teachers' lack of learning retention. In other words, they learn language only for passing exams and attaining certificates. It is not among their goals to employ what they learn in new situations. Therefore, they do not benefit from what they achieve in upgrading their language proficiency levels.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the current study, the researcher may infer that General Secondary Certificate exams are not effective predictors of language proficiency. Polices and decisions of accepting students into university language programs should rely on different determinants. Moreover, EFL prospective teachers' four-year preparation in the Egyptian faculties of education does not necessarily develop all language proficiency components. It is recommended to reconsider the goals, methods of teaching, content and evaluation techniques of academic courses in academic English departments. Modern methodology and assessment techniques should be integrated into these courses. In addition, the content of specialized academic courses needs to be revolutionized to be more up-to-date, adaptive to the current professional requirements and considerate of prospective teachers' needs.

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