The Effect of Proficiency on "Non-Native" EFL Teachers' Feelings and Self-Reported Behaviours

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Abstract

The current study addresses the question whether the level of proficiency of teachers who teach a "non-native" language, English, affects their attitudes, motivation, well-being and self-reported classroom practices. This quantitative study is based on a cross-sectional research design in order to investigate the relationship between actual English proficiency of 376 English Foreign Language teachers from around the world who had English as a Foreign Language and feelings and self-reported behaviours. Statistical analyses showed that more proficient teachers scored higher on the dimensions "Classroom practice" and "Attitudes toward students and institution". They were also more motivated and happier. Intermediate (B1-B2) teachers scored significantly lower on these measures than EFL educators with Advanced proficiency (C1-C2). No significant differences emerged between teachers at Lower advanced (C1) and Upper advanced levels (C2). An argument is made that all dependent and independent variables are connected, highly dynamic and interacting directly and indirectly, which means that causality is multi-directional. The implication is that educational authorities should organise regular in-service training to maintain and boost teachers' proficiency because investing in teachers' linguistic skills represents a long-term investment in their emotional well-being and will ultimately benefit their students.

Keywords: attitudes, classroom practices, EFL teaching, foreign language users, motivation, proficiency, well-being

Erratum: Due to a production error, this manuscript was reuploaded on June 8, 2022, with a correction made to the article title and the second sentence of Abstract.

Elaine Horwitz, a pioneer of teacher training and foreign language anxiety research, listed the following characteristics of good "non-native" language teachers: "good humour, creativity, understanding of young people, love of the language and culture, high language proficiency, a solid background in methodology and a flexible teaching style" (1996, p. 371). The paper may be 26 years old but the notion of what makes a good "non-native" teacher has not changed. She notes that too many "non-native" teachers think that only fluency matters. She admits that it would be great for "non-native" teachers to speak the foreign language (FL) flawlessly but acknowledges that this is rather rare. Teachers who feel unable to reach this level of idealized proficiency may suffer from debilitating anxiety, even if they did actually achieve very high levels of proficiency in the FL. Horwitz adds that "non-native" teachers should be proud of their achievement. She concludes that at an institutional level, it is crucial to organise training for pre-service and in-service "non-native" teachers to help them maintain and improve their proficiency in the FL.

One aspect that has changed since 1996 is the use of the term "non-native" which is increasingly seen as being toxic. Swan, Aboshiha and Holliday (2015) talked about the "tyranny of native-speakerism" in the worldwide English language teaching profession. Dewaele, Bak and Ortega (2021) argued that the idea that FL learners should attain some mythical unattainable "native" norm is unrealistic and discriminatory. In order to avoid the used of these loaded terms, Dewaele (2018a) introduced the terms "L1 user" and "LX user". "LX" refers to any language acquired after the age of three. Contrary to 'native' and "non-native" speaker, the labels "L1/LX" do not imply any level of proficiency. LX users may have varying levels of proficiency in their LX, from minimal to maximal but crucially they are seen as legitimate users of the LX. The new L1/LX dichotomy allows researchers to avoid the deficit view that is inherent in the term "non-native" speaker.

What Horwitz (1996) did not mention was exactly how proficient LX teachers should be to qualify as "good" teachers. Proficiency requirements differ depending on the country, the type of institution, the age and level of the students. Requirements can also be vague, namely a degree in the FL without any specific mention of proficiency level. In the United Kingdom, graduate students and student teachers who wish to teach a language that is not their L1 are required to have at least C1 level for entry at the Institute of Education, University College London[1], a world-leading provider of teacher training for Early Years, Primary and Secondary education. The C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2020) refers to advanced, proficient users. This same level (C1-C2) is required in other institutions that offer training courses for teachers for whom English is a FL, such as Trinity College London. The present paper will investigate whether English Foreign language (EFL) teachers who have only a B1 or B2 level in English differ from their more advanced (C1 and C2) colleagues in terms of self-reported practices, emotions, attitudes and motivation. In other words, is the C1 level really the proficiency threshold for being a "good" teacher?

[1] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/applying-international-student

Research Questions

The present study aims to address the following research questions:

1. Is the English LX proficiency of EFL teachers linked to their attitudes toward their students and institution, and their self-reported classroom practices?
2. Is the English LX proficiency of EFL teachers linked to their motivation?
3. Is the English LX proficiency of EFL teachers linked to their well-being?

Literature Review

Non-Native Speakers

Llurda (2009) pointed out that at the start of the new millennium researchers started to agree that "non-native" speakers may be just as good teachers as "native speaker" teachers but that did not seem to dent the perceived superiority of the "native speaker teacher" in the EFL profession.

A few years earlier, Mahboob (2004) had already argued that the discrimination against "non-native" teachers was linked to programme administrators who mistakenly believed that students did not want them and thus avoided hiring them. Holliday (2005) described "native-speakerism" in the EFL profession as the mistaken belief that that Western "native speakers" are the best models and teachers of English. He attributed the deep and sustained prejudice against "non-native" teachers as the result of racism and cultural prejudice (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009). In later work, Holliday (2015) described "native-speakerism" as a "wide-spread cultural disbelief (…) in the cultural contribution of teachers who have been labelled 'non-native speakers'" (p. 11). Kumaravadivelu (2016) claimed that the inequity against "non-native" teachers in EFL teaching is continuing and these people are victims of a hegemonic power structure.

An indication that teachers themselves do no longer share the view that "native speaker" teachers are superior emerged from Dewaele, Mercer, Talbot and von Blanckenburg (2020). The researchers developed a research design to measure implicit bias against "non-native" EFL teachers in judgements of teaching competence. Three hundred Austrian and German pre-service EFL teachers watched an identical short video of a teacher in front of an EFL classroom and used Likert scales to rate her performance on four dimensions (language, teaching, assessment, communication) as well as in item on their willingness to have this person as their English teacher. Half of the participants were told that the teacher was a "native speaker" teacher, the other half that she was a "non-native speaker" teacher. The differences between both conditions were found to be non-significant. The strongest predictor of willingness to have that teacher was her teaching skill. In other words, there was no bias against "non- native speaker" EFL teachers. Of course, parents, students and school management may still hold a bias against "non-native" teachers.

The Relationship between Teachers' Proficiency and Teaching Ability

Shin (2008) pointed out that "Having an excellent command of the target language is indeed one of the most important characteristics of outstanding foreign language teachers" (p. 59). FL teachers' proficiency has direct consequences on what takes places in the classroom as teachers with limited proficiency in the target language might struggle to access language resources,

including authentic material, and are more likely to stick to the textbook (Farrell & J. C. Richards, 2007). They also risk providing incorrect responses to students and they may struggle to notice learner language errors. Their linguistic insecurity may be particularly acute in oral interactions which may push them to tighten their grip over the class. Researchers have also used self-reports and test results compiled by institutions using their own instruments (Digap, 2016). Other measurements of proficiency rely on observers' judgments of direct classroom observation.

Expressing their surprise at the scarcity of research in this area, Moussu and Llurda (2008) issued the following call: "language proficiency has never been used as an independent variable in order to observe and describe differences among NNS teachers. Such an analysis might greatly contribute to a greater understanding of the role of the teacher's language proficiency in language teaching" (p. 339). More researchers have focused on this topic since then but their epistemological and methodological choices have made generalizations difficult. A positive development is that researchers have started arguing for a more nuanced view of language teachers' proficiency and have combatted the deficit view surrounding LX teachers. Kamhi-Stein (2009) argued that language proficiency is only part of the teacher professional profile, and teacher training programmes should focus on issues surrounding language proficiency regardless of whether the teachers were L1 users or LX teachers. Richards, Conway, Roskvist and Harvey (2013), for example, pointed out that linguistic proficiency is only one part of subject knowledge, among other subsets of skills that for foreign language teachers need to master. Other skills include knowledge of the curriculum, of the syllabus, of pedagogical principles, of the target language culture and of the theory of second language acquisition. The authors carried out a case study of seven New Zealand teachers of foreign languages and found that teachers with low level of target language proficiency were able carry out some aspects of effective language teaching but they struggled when having to provide meaningful explanations, rich language input and an ability to improvise. A such, they were more suited for beginners' classes.

Faez and Karas (2017) reviewed the research on the link between teacher proficiency and teaching ability. The authors found a relatively weak positive correlation between teacher' language proficiency and their confidence in their classroom abilities in 10 out of 11 studies. However, only one study used an actual language proficiency test, all others used self-reported proficiency measures in the four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). Following the same avenue, Faez, Karas and Uchihara (2021) carried out a meta-analysis of 19 studies to investigate the relationship between language proficiency and teaching ability of English LX teachers. The authors found a moderate positive relationship between language proficiency and teaching self-efficacy.

The Concept of Proficiency

Proficiency is not a static concept, it is merely a snapshot at one moment in time of a process started many years earlier when the teacher was still a student, and it likely to develop further in life. Some of these differences are learner-internal (micro-level), others are learner-external at a meso-level (classroom, school, education system) or even at a macro-level) (historical, political, ideological context). Variables at these different levels interact, which means that the effect of any single variable can be different because of the many interactions. High proficiency is more likely to emerge when micro-, meso- and macro-levels are aligned, namely if a learner has all the right personal attributes to learn a target language, with good teaching and plenty of rich input, in an environment that values the target language. Imperfect alignment of the various

levels is not necessarily an obstacle if the learner is willing to make an effort and if alternative paths are available to improve mastery of the target language. These various levels continue to play a role when LX learners become LX teachers. There will inevitably be variation in the extent to which new teachers will be willing and able to maintain and develop their proficiency. It is likely that if they feel respected and valued in their institution, they may decide to further improve their proficiency.

The concept of proficiency is the bedrock of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) developed by the Council of Europe. Six levels of language proficiency are distinguished: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, which can be regrouped into three broad levels: Basic User, Independent User and Proficient User. Measurement happens through "can-do" descriptors for listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing (https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions).

Foreign Language Education policy is very much influenced by the CEFR which serves as a benchmark for language education around the world and influences educational policies (see for example, Rehner, Popovitch & Lasan, 2021). It allows transparency in comparing expected progress and outcomes of FL learning and it allows officials to set thresholds for both learners and teachers. For example, Thai secondary school English teachers are expected to have reached B2 level, yet a CEFR-referenced online placement test organised by the ministry of education in 2015 revealed that 94% had failed to reach this level and that A2 level (basic user) was much more common than expected (Franz & Teo, 2018).

Freeman, Katz, Gomez and Burns (2015) have called for a reconceptualization of teacher language proficiency, taking a language-for-specific-purposes approach, arguing that teacher language proficiency should not be seen as general language proficiency such as probed by the CEFR but rather specific command of classroom English. This debate lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

The Relationship between EFL Teachers' Classroom Behavior and their Emotional, Motivational and Attitudinal Dimensions

The field has witnessed a rapid growth of interest in the topic of teacher psychology (de Dios Martinez Agudo, 2018; Gkonou, Dewaele & King, 2020; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018). Dewaele and Mercer (2018) developed an online questionnaire to collect self-reports from of 513 EFL teachers from around the world who had English as an L1 or as an LX. Four studies have been published on parts of the dataset and the present study is the fifth, focusing on a subgroup of participants in the database, namely the English LX users. The first study was Dewaele and Mercer (2018) that looked at individual differences in self-reported attitudes toward their students. Participants with higher Trait Emotional Intelligence, more experience and higher proficiency were found to have significantly more positive attitudes toward their students. The second study on the same database showed that participants with high levels of Trait Emotional Intelligence scored significantly higher on pedagogical skills, creativity and classroom management. Teachers who had been in the profession for longer also reported significantly better classroom management and pedagogical skills and more creativity in their classrooms (Dewaele, Gkonou & Mercer, 2018). The third study (Dewaele, 2018b) zoomed in on the effect of Global Trait Emotional Intelligence as well as the specific effect of the four factors that constitute this personality trait (sociability, well-being, self-control and emotionality). Sociability and well-being turned out to be most strongly

positively correlated with classroom management and pedagogical skills. A difference was also uncovered between L1 and LX users of English, with Global Trait EI and emotionality being significantly positively linked to the English proficiency of the latter but not to that of the former. The fourth study (Dewaele, 2020) looked for links between dimensions of teacher motivation, dimensions of Trait Emotional Intelligence, teaching experience, status of English, English proficiency, age and gender. Motivation was found to be positively linked with all four factors of Trait Emotional Intelligence. High proficiency in English was linked to stronger motivation. Female teachers were also found to be more highly motivated.

This literature review shows that researchers have found links between teachers' proficiency and various aspects of their teaching ability, confidence and motivation, which are in turn linked to psychological and sociobiographical variables. Considering the Thai ministry's requirement that its secondary English teachers reach a B2 level (Franz & Teo, 2018) and University College London's insistence on C1 as threshold for their graduate students and English LX teachers, the study will investigate whether a difference exists in the self-reported classroom behavior, attitudes toward students and institution, motivation, and well-being of EFL teachers who had English as an LX who scored above or below C1.

Methodology

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling was used to reach potential participants who had to be EFL teachers (Ness Evans & Rooney, 2013). Calls for participation with a link to the anonymous questionnaire were sent out widely through direct communication and through posts on social media including forums of EFL teacher associations in 2016. Participants were invited to forward the call to their EFL colleagues. A total of 513 participants from across the world filled out the questionnaire in English[2]. The present study focusses on a sub-group, namely 376 EFL teachers for whom English was an LX. Participants varied in age, country of residence and language background which strengthens the ecological validity of the data, as local effects are averaged out. Participants completed a short sociobiographical questionnaire before doing a lexical decision task to determine their English proficiency. They then answered the closed questions about their attitudes, motivation and classroom behavior. The research design received ethical approval from the authors' institution.

Participants

A total of 376 participants (295 females, 77 males, 4 preferred not to say) filled out the questionnaire. The largest group were Ukrainians (n = 37), Greek (n = 30), Azerbaijani (n = 25), Argentinian (n = 14), Chinese (n = 14), and smaller numbers of participants with other nationalities. Most participants were teaching English at university (n = 197), others taught in secondary schools (n = 120) and primary schools (n = 59). Further demographic information of the participants in presented in table 1.

[2] We assumed that a B1 level of English was sufficient to understand the questionnaire.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	19	76	38.8	10.2
Years as a teacher	0.1	50	14.2	10.1
Number of languages known	2	6	3.5	1.1

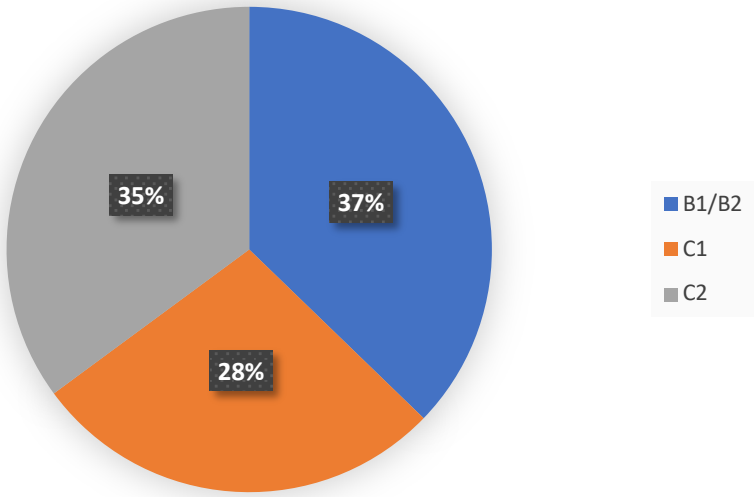
Independent Variable

The independent variable was general English proficiency[3], based on the 60-item test developed by Lemhöfer and Broersma (2012), which takes 5 minutes to complete. The LexTALE test requires participants to distinguish real English words from English-looking words that do not exist in English, using a YES/NO format. Its scores correlate highly with TOEIC test results, an established test of English proficiency that takes approximately 2½ hours to complete. Thus, even though LexTALE was not designed to capture general English proficiency fully, scholars recognize it as a good indicator for intermediate to (very) high proficiency LX users. Although there has been some debate about the sampling rate of LEXTALE (Masrai, 2022), the test, which has been translated in different languages, is considered to be a sound and effective instrument for measuring vocabulary size, as a proxy for general L2 proficiency (Zhou & Li, 2021). The mean score for LEXTALE among the study participants was 83.5%, with a standard deviation of 12.9%.

Lemhöfer and Broersma (2012) equate scores below 59% on LexTALE as corresponding to the lower independent users and the lower level descriptors of the CEFR (B1 and lower). LexTALE scores between 60% and 80% correspond to Upper independent users (B2), scores between 80% and 90% correspond to Lower advanced (C1) and scores above 90% correspond to Upper advanced (C2). In the present study 140 participants had a score between 60% and 80%. The researchers consequently created a single category of "Independent users" (B1-B2). One hundred and four participants had a score between 80.1% and 90% and were labeled "Lower advanced users" (C1). The 132 participants with scores above 90.1% were labelled "Upper advanced users" (C2), 18 of which scored the maximum 100% (see Figure 1 for the distribution of proficiency level).

[3] Given the fact that the authors are not aware of valid and reliable tests that measure the command of classroom English in no more than five minutes, it was necessary to use a test that measures general proficiency instead. We feel that "teacher language proficiency" (cf. Freeman et al., 2015) is not radically different from "general language proficiency" and hence that measuring the latter provides a sufficient reflection of the former. Entering in this debate lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Figure 1
Distribution of Participants According to Proficiency Level



Dependent Variables

The first cluster of dependent variables include the Likert scale responses to 7 items out of a list of 11 items published in Dewaele (2018b). It contains statements accompanied by 5-point Likert scales ranging from "absolutely not" to "absolutely yes". The first group of statements reflect teacher emotions, attitudes, classroom practice and skills.

1. I love the English language *[Passion for English]*
2. I have a positive attitude toward the institution in which I teach *[Attitude toward the institution]*
3. I have a positive attitude toward my students *[Attitude toward students]*
4. I enjoy having lively students *[Enjoy lively students]*
5. I use English frequently in class *[Frequency of use]*
6. I see myself as a creative teacher *[Creative teacher]*
7. I frequently allow my students to work independently *[Independent students]*
8. My classes are predictable (i.e. I often stick to a similar class routine). *[Class routine]*
9. I can influence the selection of teaching content and language skills *[Influence on teaching content]*
10. I am a good English teacher in terms of classroom management skills *[Classroom management skills]*
11. I am a good English teacher in terms of pedagogic or didactic skills *[Pedagogic and didactic skills]*

Table 2 presents the range, mean scores and standard deviations for these 11 items.

Table 2
Range, Means and Standard Deviations for the First Cluster of Dependent Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Love English	3	5	4.7	0.5
Attitude toward institution	1	5	3.9	0.9
Attitude toward students	1	5	4.4	0.8
Enjoy lively students	3	5	4.3	0.7
Frequency use of English	1	5	4.6	0.7
Creative teacher	1	5	3.8	0.8
Allow independent work	2	5	3.7	0.6
Predictable	1	5	3.0	0.7
Influence over content and skills	1	5	3.7	0.8
Classroom management	1	5	3.8	0.7
Pedagogical skills	2	5	3.9	0.7

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to identify latent dimensions in the eleven items. Items with a communality below 0.2 suggest were eliminated from the analysis because of their low common variance (Child, 2006). As a result, five items including *passion for English, frequency of use, independent students, class routine, and influence on teaching content* were removed from the analysis due to low communality. The communality of the remaining six variables is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Communalities

Item	Initial	Extraction
Attitude toward the institution	.209	.312
Attitude toward students	.276	.640
Creative teacher	.295	.389
Enjoy lively students	.168	.215
Classroom management skills	.379	.544
Pedagogic and didactic skills	.394	.604

The determinant score of this EFA model is .308, showing an absence of multicollinearity (Yong & Pearce, 2013). The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is .694, indicating the sample size is just sufficient (Field, 2018). The Bartlett's test for sphericity is significant ($p < .001$), indicating factorability in the data (Yong & Pearce, 2013). Two factors were extracted in the remaining six items using Principal Axis Factoring (Table 4). Analysis of the scree plot shows two factors above the eigenvalue of 1, suggesting two factors in the exploratory factor analysis. The first factor, *"Attitude toward students and the institution"* has a Cronbach's alpha of .610, which indicates sufficient internal reliability (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2022). The second factor, *'Classroom practice'*, has a Cronbach's alpha of .711, which indicates an acceptable internal reliability.

Table 4
Factor Loadings on Attitude toward Students and the Institution, and Classroom Practice

Factor	Item	Factor loading		Cronbach's alpha
		1	2	
Attitude toward students and the institution	Attitude toward the institution		.556	.610
	Attitude toward students		.800	
Classroom practice	Creative teacher	**.587**	.372	.711
	Enjoy lively students	**.418**	.313	
	Classroom management skills	.733		
	Pedagogic and didactic skills	.770		

Extraction method: principal axis factoring; Rotation: Promax with Kaiser normalisation, 2 factors extracted.

Because the variables Attitude toward student and the institution, and classroom practice are not normally distributed (*KS* = .19 and .12, $p < .001$ respectively), non-parametric statistics were used, namely Kruskal Wallis analyses.

The second cluster of dependent variables are the scores on teacher motivation dimensions that emerged from the *Work Tasks Motivation Scale for Teachers* which deals with motivation for task completion (Fernet et al., 2008). It assesses "the constructs of intrinsic motivation, identified, introjected, and external regulations, and amotivation toward six work tasks (i.e., class preparation, teaching, evaluation of students, class management, administrative tasks, and complementary tasks)" (p. 274). The items were reformulated in order to focus specifically on the motivation to teach English. This includes 3 items per dimension with 5-point Likert scales. Possible answers ranged from "not especially" (1), "so-so" (2), "quite a lot" (3), "a lot" (4), to "very much" (5).

The first dimension is "intrinsically motivated behaviors" that teachers "are engaged in for the pleasure or the satisfaction derived from performing them" (Fernet et al., 2008, p. 258). One item was: *Because teaching English is pleasant.* The distribution was not normal (*KS* = .173, $p < .0001$). The second dimension is identified regulation, defined as "behavior that individuals choose to perform because it is congruent with their own values and goals" (p. 258). One item was: *Because it is important for me to teach English.* Because the Cronbach alpha value falls below the minimal threshold for internal consistency (Dörnyei, 2010), this dimension was excluded from further analyses. The third dimension is introjected regulation, which "corresponds to the process whereby an external demand becomes an internal representation" (Fernet et al., 2008, p. 258). One item was: *Because if I don't teach, I will feel bad.* The distribution was not normal (*KS* = .085, $p < .0001$). The fourth dimension is external regulation, which "occurs when behaviors are regulated to obtain a reward or to avoid a constraint" (Fernet et al., 2008, p. 258). One item was: *I teach English because I'm paid to do it. Mean* score was 3.46 (*SD* = .75). The distribution was not normal (*KS* = .153, $p < .0001$). Because the Cronbach alpha value was extremely low, this dimension was excluded from further analyses. The fifth and final dimension is amotivation, which "refers to being neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated" (Fernet et al., 2008, p. 258). One item was: *I don't know why because I don't always see the relevance of teaching English.* The distribution was not normal (*KS* = .180, $p < .001$).

The final dependent variable was Wellbeing, one of the four main factors of Trait Emotional Intelligence (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). It reflects "a general sense of well-being, extending from past achievements to future expectations, overall, individuals with high scores feel positive, happy and fulfilled" (Petrides, 2009: 61). It was measured through 6 items such as *I generally believe that things will work out fine in my life*. Table 5 presents an overview of the second cluster of dependent variables.

Table 5.
Range, Means and Standard Deviations for the Second Cluster of Dependent Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Cronbach alpha
Intrinsic Motivation	1.00	5.00	4.34	0.68	0.84
Identified Regulation	1.00	5.00	4.21	0.67	0.58
Introjected Regulation	1.00	5.00	2.87	0.95	0.82
External Regulation	1.00	5.00	3.46	0.75	0.02
Amotivation	1.00	5.00	1.73	0.74	0.82
Wellbeing	1.20	7.00	5.62	1.05	0.83

A Spearman rank correlation analysis was run to check for intercorrelation between the dependent variables (see Table 6). It shows that all variables are positively linked, with the exception of amotivation. Three correlation coefficients have a small effect size (*Rho* between .25 and .399) or no significant effect (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). The dependent variables can thus be considered to be independent dimensions with limited overlap.

Table 6
Intercorrelation between the Dependent Variables

	Attitude toward students and institution	Classroom practice	Intrinsic motiva-tion	Introjected regulation	Amotiva-tion	Well-being
Attitude toward students and institution	-	.286**	.295**	.150**	-.291**	.272**
Classroom practice		-	.328**	.186**	-.246**	.249**
Intrinsic motivation			-	.365**	-.291**	.270**
Introjected regulation				-	-.016	.057
Amotivation					-	.270**

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Results

A series of Kruskal Wallis analyses revealed that English proficiency level had a significant positive link with EFL teachers' attitudes toward their students and the institution where they taught: $Chi^2(2) = 14.6$, $p < .001$ (Figure 2), as well as with their classroom practices: $Chi^2(2) = 7.1$, $p < .029$ (Figure 3). The effect sizes are small (Field, 2018).

Figure 2
Mean Plot of Attitude toward Students and the Institution and Levels of Language Proficiency

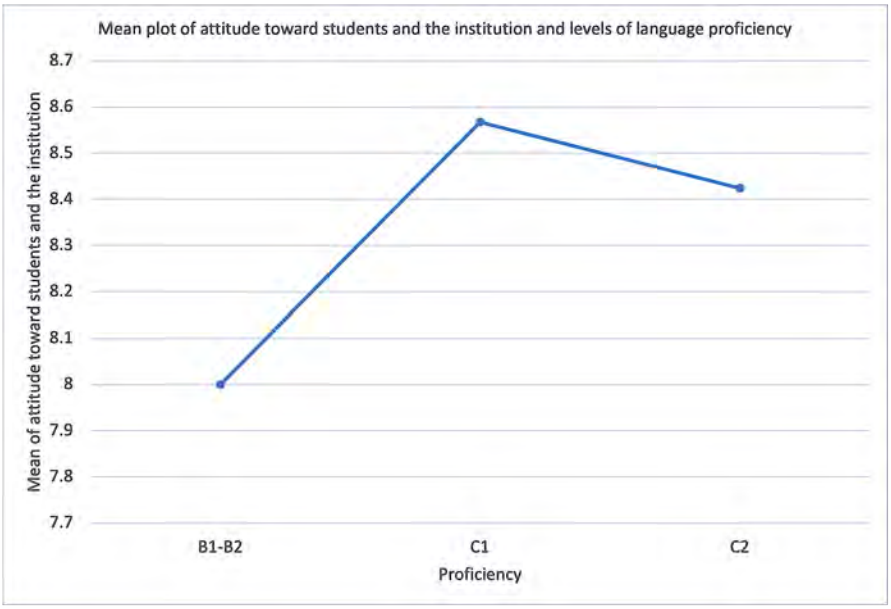
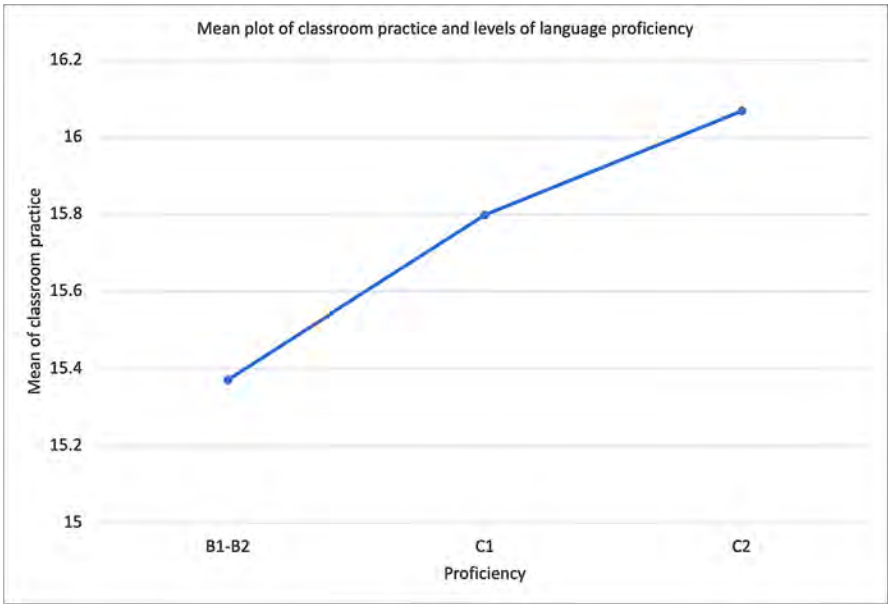


Figure 3
Mean Plot of Classroom Practice and Levels of Language Proficiency



A series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons showed that the B1-B2 group scored significantly lower than the C1 group (adjusted $p < .001$) and the C2 group (adjusted $p < .025$) in their positive attitude toward their students and the institution. The difference between the C1 and C2 groups was not significant (see Table 7).

Table 7
Pairwise Comparison of Attitude toward Students and the Institution and Language Proficiency

	Test statistic	Std. Error	*p*	Adj. *p**
B1, 2 – C1	-50.0	13.6	.001	.001
B1, 2 – C2	-33.7	12.8	.008	.025
C2 – C1	16.3	13.8	.237	.712

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

A series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons revealed a similar significant pattern for the effect of proficiency on classroom practices, i.e. higher proficiency is linked to better self-perceived classroom management, pedagogic and didactic skills, being more creative in class, and more likely to enjoy lively students. The B1-B2 group scored significantly lower on classroom practice than the C2 group (adjusted $p = .024$). The difference between the B1-B2 group and the C1 group, and between the two advanced groups was not significant (see Table 8).

Table 8
Pairwise Comparison of Classroom Practice and Language Proficiency

	Test statistic	Std. Error	*p*	Adj. *p**
B1, 2 – C1	-20.1	13.9	.148	.444
B1, 2 – C2	34.5	13.0	.008	.024
C2 – C1	-14.4	14.1	.307	.920

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

Proficiency was found to have a significant link with intrinsic motivation ($Chi^2(2) = 9.6$, $p < .008$) (Figure 4) and amotivation ($Chi^2(2) = 18.1$, $p < .001$) (Figure 5). A series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons revealed that lower levels of proficiency corresponded with significantly lower levels of intrinsic motivation. The B1-B2 group had significantly lower levels of intrinsic motivation than the C1 group (adjusted $p < .006$). The other comparisons were not significant (see Table 9).

Figure 4
Mean Plot of Intrinsic Motivation and Levels of Language Proficiency

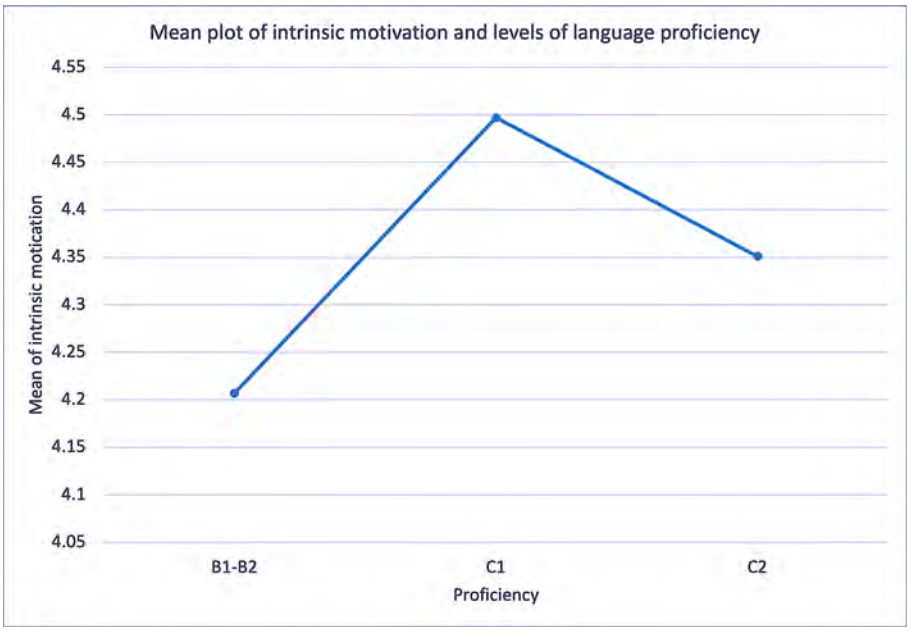


Figure 5
Mean Plot of Amotivation and Levels of Language Proficiency

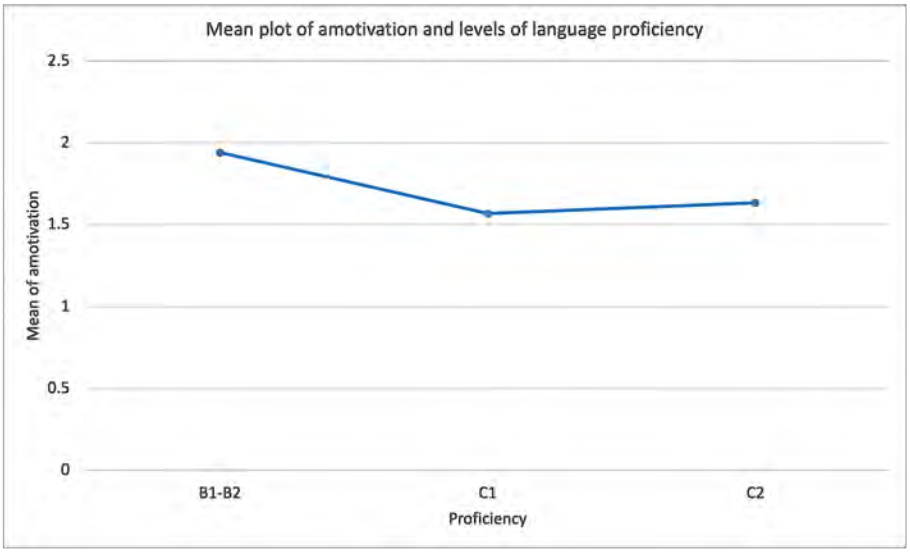


Table 9
Kruskal Wallis *Pairwise Comparison of Intrinsic Motivation and Language Proficiency*

	Test statistic	Std. Error	*p*	Adj. *p**
B1, 2 – C1	-42.1	13.6	.002	.006
B1, 2 – C2	-15.0	12.7	.238	.714
C2 – C1	27.1	13.8	.049	.148

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

A series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons revealed that lower levels of proficiency corresponded with higher levels of amotivation. The B1-B2 group had significantly higher levels of amotivation than the C1 group (adjusted $p < .0001$) and the C2 group (adjusted $p < .003$) (see Table 10).

Table 10
Kruskal Wallis Pairwise Comparison of Amotivation and Language Proficiency

	Test statistic	Std. Error	*p*	Adj. *p**
B1, 2 – C1	53.2	13.6	.001	.001
B1, 2 – C2	42.4	12.8	.001	.003
C2 – C1	-10.7	13.8	.437	1.000

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

A final series of pairwise Kruskal Wallis comparisons revealed that lower levels of proficiency were linked with lower levels of well-being, $Chi^2(2) = 8.6$, $p < .013$ (Figure 6). The B1-B2 group had significantly lower levels of well-being than the C1 group (adjusted $p < .011$). No other comparisons were significant (see Table 11).

Figure 6
Mean Plot of Well-Being and Levels of Language Proficiency

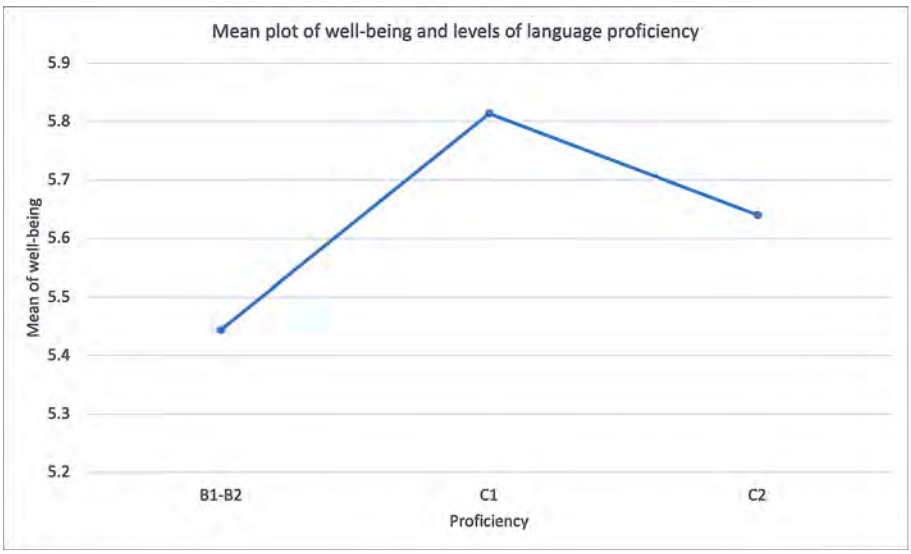


Table 11
Kruskal Wallis Pairwise Comparison of Well-Being and Language Proficiency

	Test statistic	Std. Error	*p*	Adj. *p**
B1, 2 – C1	-40.9	14.0	.004	.011
B1, 2 – C2	-21.3	13.1	.015	.315
C2 – C1	19.6	14.2	.168	.503

*Significance values adjusted with Bonferroni correction

Discussion

The first research question focused on the relationship between the actual English LX proficiency of EFL teachers and their attitudes toward their students and the institution where they taught, and their self-reported classroom practices. The second research question considered the link between proficiency and three dimensions of teacher motivation: intrinsic motivation, introjected motivation and amotivation. The third research question looked at the link between proficiency and well-being. Table 12 offers an overview of the findings, with independent variables sorted according to effect size (*r*). The effect sizes are below .250, and thus are all classified as small (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). It is striking that proficiency had a linear effect for classroom practices only but that the effect was curvilinear for the attitude variable, the two motivation and the well-being dimensions.

Table 12
Summary of Results with Variables Ordered According to Effect Size

Dependent variable	Kruskal-Wallis test	Pairwise comparison	Adj. *p*	Std. test statistics	Square root of *N*	*r*
Amotivation	$Chi^2(2) = 18.1$ $p < .001$	B1, 2 – C1 B1, 2 – C2	.001 .003	3.8 3.3	19.3 19.3	.201 .171
Attitudes toward students and institution	$Chi^2(2) = 14.6$ $p < .001$	B1, 2 – C1 B1, 2 – C2	.001 .025	-3.6 -2.6	19.3 19.3	-.189 -.136
Intrinsic motivation	$Chi^2(2) = 9.6$ $p = .008$	B1, 2 – C1	.006	-3.1	19.3	-.160
Well-Being	$Chi^2(2) = 8.6$ $p = .013$	B1, 2 – C1	.011	-2.9	19.3	-.150
Classroom practice	$Chi^2(2) = 7.0$ $p = .029$	B1, 2 – C2	.024	-2.6	19.3	-.137
Introjected regulation	$Chi^2(2) = 5.9$ p = ns					

The findings confirm and expand previous research (Dewaele, 2018c, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2018; Digap, 2016; Farrell & Richards, 2007; Shin, 2008). It shows that English LX proficiency of EFL teachers is linked to their emotions, attitudes, motivation and even their

well-being. It concurs with the findings that a positive relationship exists between teacher' language proficiency, their self-confidence, efficacy and professional identity (Diagap, 2016; Faez & Karas, 2017). It also fits with the pattern reported in Faez, Karas and Uchihara's meta-analysis (2021) on the relationship between language proficiency and teaching ability of English LX teachers. An original finding is that LX teacher proficiency is not linked to teachers' attitudes (Dewaele & Mercer, 2018) but to their motivation and even their well-being. Higher proficiency LX teachers suffered less from amotivation, had stronger intrinsic motivation, had higher well-being and had more positive attitudes toward their students and their institution.

Moreover, proficiency was found to exert a particularly strong effect on self-reported classroom practices which included pedagogic and didactic skills and creativity. The finding fits nicely with H. M. Richards et al.'s (2013) observation that lower proficiency limits teachers' ability to improvise, to provide meaningful explanations and to give students rich language input.

The findings offer support to the idea that a proficiency threshold may exist for English LX teachers. Where significant proficiency effects were found, the differences were always bigger between the independent users (B1-B2) and the advanced users, than **within** the advanced group (C1 and C2) where the differences were never significant. It suggests that teachers who were assessed to be independent users (B1-B2 level) scored significantly lower for classroom practices, intrinsic motivation, attitudes toward students, well-being and scored significantly higher for amotivation than advanced users. Interpreting these results is challenging because causality could be bi-directional. While there is no doubt that being more proficient has positive consequences on attitudes, motivation well-being and classroom practices, one could argue that causality also runs in the opposite direction. All the dependent variables are interconnected (cf. Table 6) which means they could change together and could be linked to other variables. All variables, including unidentified ones, could have exerted a collective pull on proficiency, creating a feedback loop, where increased positivity in attitudes, emotion, well-being and motivation could have led to increased effort by the teacher to become more proficient. In other words, the causal pathways in the statistical analyses could be bi- or even multi-directional. Indeed, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that LX teachers who feel highly motivated by their job, who love their students, who feel creative in class, and who have a high sense of well-being, will do things in English both inside and outside the classroom that were not measured (cracking jokes with students, having them sing along, as well as extra-curricular activities like reading, watching films or material on the internet, going to a museum, finding English-speaking partners or friends) which could, all combined, boost proficiency in English. It may also be acknowledged that the sample, having been collected through a combination of convenience and purposive sampling, is not representative of the whole field of EFL teachers. However, given the large size of the sample and the diversity in background of the participants, the study may provide a glimpse of more general statistical patterns that exist among EFL teachers around the world. Finally, there was no information on participants' teaching degrees, which could also have explained some of the variation (Akbari & Moradkhani, 2012) but the pattern that university teachers scored higher on proficiency than secondary school colleagues fits the pattern reported in Digap (2016).

The finding that teachers with C2 levels of English do not do significantly better than those with C1 levels shows that it is not necessary to be maximally proficient in order to be a good teacher, confirming the argument in Horwitz (1996). However, the finding that teachers at B1-B2 levels scored significantly lower than colleagues at C1-C2 levels on some crucial

dimensions has important pedagogical implications. It could be used as an argument for educational authorities to assure that teachers have sufficient proficiency and organise regular in-service training to maintain and boost that proficiency. Investment in teachers' linguistic skills also represents a long-term investment in their emotional well-being. Crucially, having proficient, motivated and happy teachers will ultimately benefit their students.

The study is not without limitations, which are linked to the nature of the research design. Because the aim of the study was to identify broad statistical patterns about the effect of proficiency, there were no participants' voices which could have contributed to a more granular understanding of the phenomena that were observed. Interviews could provide explanations on why EFL teachers with a B1-B2 level lack confidence about their classroom practices, have lower intrinsic motivation, higher amotivation, less positive attitudes toward students, and lower well-being compared to their more proficient colleagues. Further qualitative research is needed to investigate this in more detail.

Conclusion

The present study found that University College London's C1 threshold for graduate students and for English LX users wishing to enrol in teacher training courses is spot on. While a higher proficiency is an extra strength for LX teachers, it ceases to matter much anymore once they reach the threshold of advanced users (C1 or C2). Proficiency does however start to have a stronger effect if English LX teachers are B1-B2 users or below because it limits their ability to create an optimal environment with sufficient rich language interactions which learners will enjoy and which is likely to quicken their progress as a result. Of course, the relationship between teachers' proficiency and teaching ability is complex and highly dynamic with several interacting variables. Part of the complexity of the relationship is related to the nature of proficiency itself which changes over time. The same is true for attitudes, emotion, motivation and well-being. Any teacher can testify to the occasional disappointment when a class does not go according to plan and, as a consequence, attitudes, emotion, motivation and well-being may sag momentarily. Trying to pin down the exact influence and position of each variable, and the relative distance between them, is akin to trying to frame a whorl of colourful flower petals gently swaying in the breeze in a black and white two-dimensional space.

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