Bachelor Leraar Basisonderwijs

English in Dutch Primary Schools: The Impact of Teachers' Proficiency in English on Their Attitude towards Teaching English

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Student: Marilene van den Herik
Student number: 170685
Supervisor: Jaap Vlasblom
1st assessor:
2nd assessor:

Abstract

This research is a contribution to the studies about a teachers' proficiency and attitude. This case study focuses on finding out if there is a correlation between the teachers' proficiency in English and the teachers' attitude towards teaching English in Dutch schools. As the English language is taking up a more and more prominent position in our everyday lives, teachers have to make sure that their English language skills are up to date as well, so they can offer the students the knowledge they will need in the future. However, during my four internships in Dutch primary schools, I frequently noticed that many teachers struggle with certain aspects of the English language, such as pronunciation and grammar, which often ended in a dislike for the subject. This made me wonder if there was a link between the teachers' proficiency and their attitude when teaching English. Based on a theoretical framework and a survey amongst 44 Dutch Primary School teachers, a conclusion was drawn. This research concludes that there are indeed positive correlations between the two variables, most remarkably between the statement "I dread teaching English" and "vocabulary" of ($r = 0.717$). This can be interpreted as that the more proficient a teacher is, the more relaxed and comfortable this teacher will feel when teaching English.

Table of Content

I Introduction

Teachers are responsible for preparing students to actively participate in our society as capable citizens (Caena, 2011). Receiving good English lessons from capable teachers are a prerequisite for offering students what they need. However, as Bachelor student of Primary Education, I frequently noticed during all of my four internships in Dutch primary schools that many teachers struggle with aspects of the English language, such as pronunciation and grammar. Their dislike of the language often resulted in them asking me if I would be willing to teach these English lessons. I am confident with talking in English; it comes naturally to me, and I enjoy teaching the subject. After I paid closer attention to the relation between the teachers' proficiency and the teacher's motivation, I noticed that many of the teachers who disliked teaching the subject also seemed insecure about their language skills. This could be problematic. When teachers who have seemingly low confidence in their foreign language skills seem to dislike teaching the English subject more than teachers who are more confident, this will most likely negatively impact the students' skills to become capable global citizens. To shed more light on this issue, I have formulated the following research question: *"To what extent does the teachers' proficiency in English influence the teachers' attitude towards teaching English?"*

To date, very little research exists on the effect of the teachers' language skills on the teachers' attitude towards the subject (Butler, 2007). Therefore, I decided to bridge this gap and find out if there is a relation between the two. The societal relevance of this paper is also significant. Data and research gathered in this thesis can be used to gain insight into the current situation and can be used to provide teachers with what they need to teach English. The school where I am currently interning, Kindcentrum Prins Constantijn, was curious about these results as well. My recommendations will be used to improve their current English education if the two factors are found to be connected.

To receive an answer to my research question, a research strategy will be created, existing of a theoretical framework, methodology, the results of the gathered data, a conclusion and a recommendation based on the results and conclusion. The theoretical framework starts with some background information necessary to place the data into the proper context. Secondly, the teacher's comfortableness with the language is discussed, followed by literature about the importance of input when mastering a language. The latter was added to explain why speaking English in the lesson is so very important and what a teachers' proficiency is based on. These three paragraphs are followed up by a paragraph about the proficiency of an average primary school teacher and a paragraph about the attitude towards English as a proficient English speaker. Both are necessary to understand the analysis of the data better. At the end of the theoretical framework, two hypotheses are drawn up. These hypotheses are then tested using survey data and statistical analysis. Based on the outcomes of my research, a few recommendations will be made that can be applied by teachers and schools on their English education.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Background

English in Dutch primary schools, also known as EIBO, was first introduced as an compulsory subject in year 7 and 8 in 1986 (Corda, Phielix, & Krijnen, 2012; Oostdam, 2010). Only two years earlier, in 1984, schools offering teacher training (academies) were obligated to offer English to their students (Herder & de Bot, 2005). Attainment targets for Dutch primary schools soon followed in 1993 (Lobo, 2013). These goals are based on a communicative approach and are divided into three domains: oral, auditory and written (Lobo, 2013). However, there are still significant differences in English education in primary schools (Thijs, Tuin, & Trimbos, 2011). Upon the introduction of English, the Dutch Department of Education never specified which year schools should start teaching English. Therefore, schools are free in their choices of class time spent on English, teacher choice, didactics and the year they start teaching the subject (Geurts, De Graaff & Hemker, 2014; Eurydice Studies, 2005).

There are four general categories of English education in Dutch primary schools (SLO, 2020; Van den Heuvel, 2016):

1. Standard English in primary schools (EIBO): English is taught only in year 7 and 8.
2. Early EIBO: English is taught from year 5 or 6.
3. Early foreign language teaching: English is taught from year one onwards. 15% of class time is taught in English.
4. Bilingual primary education: English is taught from year one onwards. 30-50% of class time is in English.

Although there is no formal beginning date, 66% of all primary schools start teaching English in years 7 and 8, making this the most common practice in schools (Thijs et al., 2011). This number is slowly changing as more and more schools are starting to offer English in earlier groups (SLO, 2020; CBS, 2011; Thijs, 2012). The Board of Education recommends that schools start in year 5 with teaching English (Oostdam, 2010). This is in contrast with international research conducted by Genesee & Lindholm-Leary (2013), Muñoz (2006) and Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen, & Hargreaves (1974). Their research shows that when it comes to learning and acquiring a language, it is not a matter of 'the sooner, the better' like with many other subjects.

There is a big difference in class time spent on English per school (Bodde-Alderlieste, 2005). Although there are guidelines provided by the Education Council of 80-100 hours that should be spent on English education per year, almost no schools have achieved this directive (Bodde-Alderlieste, 2005). Instead, most schools spend no more than 30-50 hours on English per year (Oostdam, 2010; Bodde-Alderlieste, 2005; Thijs et al., 2010). Oostdam (2010) recommends that schools spend about one hour a week on English. However, students should not be overfed with English lessons when teaching this subject, as the phrase, 'the more, the better' does not apply to language learning (Genesee, 2004; Muñoz, 2016).

2.2 Comfortableness with the language

The ease with which teachers can apply a foreign language such as English in classrooms has everything to do with how one has mastered the language (Herrell & Jordan, 2016). Krashen (1981) hypothesised two different ways to master a second language, namely 'Acquisition' and 'Learning'. The acquisition

is the result of a subconscious process, while learning is the result of being taught explicitly about the rules of a language (Schütz, 2005). Knowing the distinction between the two is essential when acquiring a new language (Herrell & Jordan, 2016).

Krashen reports five ways to acquire a language. I have chosen the three most relevant hypotheses to elucidate how acquiring a language is achieved and the importance of self-confidence when acquiring and producing, which can also be applied to teachers. The monitor hypothesis (Kashen, 1981) states a connection between acquisition and learning, in which acquisition takes care of fluency and the ability to tap into the language quickly. On the other hand, learning is responsible for correcting the sentences acquired and thus serves as a monitor only (Schütz, 2005). The affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1981) states that the students' mood and well-being affect language acquisition. When a student experiences negative feelings such as self-doubt and fear of public speaking, the filter will 'go up', making language acquisition more difficult (Park, Hong, Choi, Hwi, Larsen, 2014; Patrick, 2019, Schütz, 2005). Success depends on the following three variables: anxiety, motivation and self-confidence (Krashen, 1981).

2.3 The effect of input on the mastery of a language

Another hypothesis of Krashen's theory (1981) is the input hypothesis. This hypothesis assumes that languages can be acquired through the input one gets (Abukhattala, 2012; Schütz, 2005). This is very relevant, as the input teachers have gotten over the years affects their mastery of the English language and may explain why it is crucial that teachers talk English during the lesson. In most classrooms, the students get taught the basics of the language structures, and then they start practising this knowledge through speaking and writing (Hatch, 1978). Instead of providing the students with input, these teachers force output from their students as they want them to start speaking the language straightaway. However, this method has proven to be ineffective as it scares the students away and simultaneously develops the notion that they cannot acquire a second language (Patrick, 2019). Therefore, it is vital that teachers provide their students with much input, starting by training the receptive skills (listening and reading) and then moving on to productive skills (speaking and writing). This way, you will see direct results of the students understanding the input they have been given. (Abukhattala, 2012; Patrick, 2019). The input should be similar to everyday language, exposing the students to a natural way of communicating (Abukhattala, 2012; Krashen, 1981).

This theory is confirmed by Verspoor, Schuitemaker-King, Van Rein, De Bot, & Edelenbos (2010) as they state that using the target language as the spoken language is one of the most effective ways to learn a foreign language. According to Westhoff (2008) and De Graaff (2013), much exposure to the language is a necessary prerequisite when you expect your students to acquire a language, provided that the input is meaningful for the students. However, teachers should also not talk too much, as students should be able to express themselves (Cullen, 1998). When lessons become more teacher-focussed, students will show less initiative and give shorter answers (Brock-Utne, 2007; Lo & Macaro, 2012). An explanation for this could be the students' and teachers' lack of proficiency (Wierenga, 2014), as the number of questions asked by the teacher subsided significantly because of their inexperience when teaching in another language (Lo & Macaro, 2012; Farahian & Rezaee, 2012).

Nonetheless, various studies show that the more input the students get, the better they will perform when learning a foreign language (Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1998). This is most effective when the teachers' input is similar to natural conversations full of irregularities and interesting structures (Corda

et al., 2012; Abukhattala, 2012). Globally, however, a lot of emphasis is put on grammar and translating exercises in the classroom. Research shows that 67,4 % of the teachers regularly speak Dutch in the classroom during the English lesson and 18,8 % of the participants talk only Dutch in their lessons (Popma, 1997), even though multiple studies have shown that the communicative approach with much English interaction is the best way for young children to acquire a language (Corda et al., 2012). Moreover, only 22% of the teachers' time when teaching English is spent on conversing with students (Heesters, Feddema, Van der Schoot, & Hemker, 2008), even though 'learning by doing' and 'total language immersion' is easily achievable when teaching and very effective (Bouman, 1998; Genesee, 2014).

2.4 The proficiency of an average primary school teacher

Currently, most English lessons in primary schools are being taught by regular teachers (Heesters et al., 2008). Research shows that 59% of these teachers have not received English education during their time at the academy (Oostdam, 2010). This has mainly to do with the fact that EIBO was not a compulsory subject until 1983 (Van der Velden, Deunk & Doolaard, 2015). Therefore they did not receive any education on the subject (Thijs et al., 2011). When EIBO was first introduced at primary schools, all teachers were allowed to do training (Carpay, 1990). Roughly 14% of the teachers participating in the research report having followed this training (Oostdam, 2010), meaning that 27% had not received any proper education on the subject (Oostdam, 2010). This is a slight improvement from 2001-2002, where 38% of the teachers had not had any training in teaching the English language (Oostdam & Van Toorenburg, 2002). Despite this lack of training, 82% of Dutch primary school teachers respectively believe that their skills are sufficient when teaching English (Thijs et al., 2011; Oostdam, 2010).

When EIBO was first introduced, most academies did not support the subject English in their curriculum. Until 1995, only a handful of academies in the Netherlands took the subject seriously and spent their classes on both didactics and personal skills related to English teaching (Van Gool, 2006). Although academies are legally required to offer English to their students, the numbers of academies offering English decreased in 2003 (De Boer, 2003). This decrease is somewhat remarkable given that more and more primary schools were starting to introduce English in year 5 to their students, therefore needing more teachers capable of teaching English (Bodde-Alderlieste, 2005). In 2012, a slight positive change was observed in the attention academies devoted to English in their curriculum (Corda et al., 2012). This change was brought upon by the growing need for knowledge and support in VVTO schools (Corda et al., 2012). However, the academies should focus on the actual contents of the subject, like fluency (Van der Meij-Dijkman, 2006). By rearranging the contents of their English curriculum, even more space could be cleared for language skills and didactics (Van der Meij-Dijkman, 2006). To the best of my knowledge, there are no recent studies that have mapped the current situation concerning the attention given to English by academies.

The insufficient attention given by academies to English is reflected in the students' opinion about the English education they have received, as very few of them have a positive attitude towards their education (Thijs, 2012). Three-quarters of these students think that their schooling only had a minimal contribution to their fluency, writing skills and knowledge about early foreign language education. More than half of them (76%) have had minimal teaching in didactics and the skills necessary for teaching English (Thijs et al., 2011; Geurts & Hemker, 2012). Most teachers at the academies are aware of this issue and realise that the lessons offered are insufficient to bring their students' English to the correct level they will need in their classrooms (Thijs, 2012). Nonetheless, no significant changes are being made because of the crammed curriculum (Van Gool, 2006) and the low priority (Thijs, 2012).
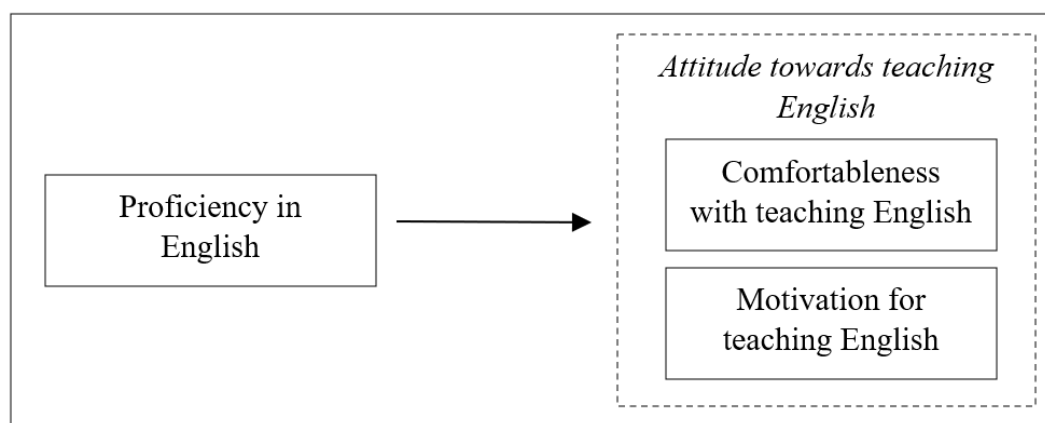
Teaching academies presume that all students have followed higher general secondary education, also known as havo, and should have attained a B2 level (English Proficiency Index) in English (Van Gool, 2006). However, only 29% of the teachers in the work field believe they are functioning at the B2 level. 49% of the teachers think they operate on a B1 level in English (Thijs, 2012). Furthermore, the group of students from post-secondary vocational education (mbo) that continue after their graduation with the Teacher Academy have, on average, not attained this level of English proficiency (Van der Meij-Dijkman, 2016). Unfortunately, there is not enough time in the curriculum for these students to catch up (Bodde-Alderlieste, 2005; Thijs, 2012). This group of students is growing (Bodde-Alderlieste, 2005), meaning that more and more students do not achieve the level of fluency they need to teach proper English lessons (Bodde-Alderlieste, 2005). As a result, many havo and mbo students have developed a fear of public speaking because of not mastering English sufficiently enough (Van Gool, 2006).

2.5 Attitude towards English as a proficient English speaker

So, with the above in mind, what does this mean for a more proficient teacher in the English language? It is important to note that fluency is important when teaching a foreign language, but that multiple studies show that the mastery of didactics outweighs the importance of the teachers' fluency (Burstall et al., 1974; Koster, 1986). However, a combination of a teacher proficient in fluency and good didactical skills is crucial when teaching the students' fluency (Van den Broek, De Graaff, Unsworth, & Van der Zee, 2014). So, even though native speakers speak the language proficiently, this does not mean that their results are better than teachers who speak English as a secondary language (Van den Broek et al., (2014). Árva and Medgyes (2000) support this theory with their study on native teachers versus non-native teachers in the classroom. They concluded that non-native teachers had likely encountered the same obstacles as their students while learning the language, thus increasing the teachers' sensitivity and empathy (Árva & Madgyes, 2000).

2.6 Conceptual model

Table 2.6 shows the way this research will be shaped. In the theoretical framework, most information is roughly sub-divided into 'comfortableness' and 'proficiency' and will be connected to the teachers' motivation for teaching English. The teachers' motivation will be based on what I have researched myself, as, to the best of my knowledge, there was no specific information available on this topic.

Based on my observations and the literature described in the theoretical framework, I have drawn up two hypotheses:
- · Hypothesis 1: A higher (self-reported) proficiency in English is positively associated with the comfortableness with teaching English
- · Hypothesis 2: A higher (self-reported) proficiency is positively associated with the motivation for teaching English

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design
3.1.1 Research purpose
The primary goals of this research are, first, to identify whether there is a connection between the teachers' (self-reported) proficiency in English and their comfortableness with teaching English; second, to identify whether there is a connection between the teachers' (self-reported) proficiency in English and the motivation for teaching English. Several studies describe the current situation regarding English in Dutch Primary Schools and the attitudes of teachers towards to subject. To the best of my knowledge, no studies link the teachers' proficiency to their motivation for teaching English. This research is designed to close that gap and give us more insight into the connection between the two factors.

3.1.2 Research approach
There are two methods available for data analysis – quantitative research and qualitative research. In most reports, a combination of the two approaches is used (Kasi, Achakzai, Afghan & Zaidi, 2009). To gain insight into the teachers' views, attitudes and opinions, quantitative research will be conducted. This type of research generates numerical data and data that can be transformed into statistics (Sinn, 2019). An online survey will be created with questions based on the Likert scale (Likert, 1932) and distributed amongst several schools. The outcomes will then be converted into statistics. The survey will also contain qualitative research as the participants will be asked to elaborate on their Likert-scale answers. This will make it possible to place the participants' answers into context and clarify this survey's outcomes further. The decision has been made to only do a survey, as qualitative research fits a case study best (McCombes, 2020).

3.1.3 Research strategy
This research is based on both desk and field research. Before I collected my results, literature research has been done to collect existing information on and around this topic. The information was then presented in the theoretical framework and has formed the key input for my field research. The field research consists of a survey distributed amongst several schools to validate the outcomes and make the data more reliable. The field and desk research will then be combined to conclude and answer the research question. Based on the outcome, a recommendation will be written to improve the English lessons and given input further, considering the teachers' overall attitude.

3.2 Participant group

Initially, the target group for this research were the teachers from the VCOPS school community only, which is the association of the school where I am currently a graduate intern. However, I did not get enough responses to make this research valid. I decided that these results would give a minimal view of the current situation in primary schools concerning the English curriculum. Therefore, I reached out to all my contacts and distributed the survey amongst another fifteen schools, bringing the total amount of

participating schools up to twenty. The total number of respondents to the survey are 44, including 22 from VCOPS. Table 3.2 shows the descriptive statistics of this group.

	VCOPS	Other
Number of respondents	22	22
Gender		
Female	81,8 % (18)	77,3 % (17)
Male	18,2 % (4)	22,7 % (5)
Age range		
< 20	4,5 % (1)	27,3 % (6)
20-30	31,8 % (7)	36,4 % (8)
31-40	22,7% (5)	18,2 % (4)
41-50	13,6% (3)	9,1 % (2)
51-60	13,6% (3)	9,1 % (2)
60+	13,6 % (3)	0 % (0)
Languages spoken at home		
Dutch	95,5 % (21)	95,5 % (21)
Dutch and English	4,5 % (1)	4,5 (1)
Languages spoken fluently		
Dutch	63,6 % (14)	77,3 % (17)
Dutch and English	36,4 % (8)	22,7 % (5)
Hours spend on English per week		
None	4,5 % (1)	4,5 % (1)
30 min.	18,2 % (4)	9,1 % (2)
45 min.	0 % (0)	4,5 % (1)
1 hour (+)	77,3 % (17)	68,2 % (15)
2 hours	0 % (0)	13,6 (3)
Books/materials used		
None	4,5 % (1)	9,1 % (2)
Holmwood	45,5 % (10)	13,6 % (3)
Join In	9,1 % (2)	22,7 % (5)
Take it Easy	18,2 % (4)	40,9 % (9)
IPockets	9,1 % (2)	0 % (0)
Other	13,6 % (3)	13,6% (3)
Teaching experience		
1-5 years	27,3 % (6)	68,2 % (15)
6-10 years	13,6 % (3)	4,5 % (1)
11-15 years	27,3 % (6)	4,5 % (1)
16-20 years	9,1 % (2)	9,1 % (2)
20+ years	22,7 % (5)	13,6 % (3)
Experience at current school		
1-5 years	54,5 % (12)	86,4 % (19)
6-10 years	4,5 % (1)	54,5 % (2)
11-15 years	27,3 % (6)	4,5 % (1)
16-20 years	0 % (0)	0 % (0)
20+ years	13,6 % (3)	0 % (0)

Table 3.2

3.3 Development of the instruments

3.3.1 Online Survey

The survey aims to investigate how the teachers feel about the English education in their classroom and their proficiency and comfortableness with the English language. The first few questions of this survey are personal, which are necessary to know, as this might influence the answers given later on in the survey. The main questions focus on their attitude towards the subject: the number of challenges they face, the satisfaction with how the English curriculum is currently shaped, the teachers' comfortableness with the English language and their motivation to teach and improve their lessons. The other questions

in this survey are about the teachers' proficiency and fluency. For example, which skill are they having the most trouble with, do they think their skills are sufficient to teach the subject and do they believe themselves able to speak only English during their lessons? These types of questions give the insight necessary to draw several conclusions concerning the current English education. Most of these questions are based on the five-point scale of the Likert scale, which increases the reliability of this survey as the answers are not subjected to interpretation. This questionnaire concludes with several open-ended questions, which might clarify some of the answers given and inquire after the suggestions these teachers might have to improve their English fluency and didactics skills.

3.4 Data analysis procedures

After all the data from the survey is gathered, the results will be converted into Excel. After that, the total responses (=N), the mean (=M), and the standard deviation (=SD) will be calculated. Subsequently, Pearson's correlation coefficient formula is used. This formula is used to determine whether a correlation between two questions could potentially exist. The results of this correlation test can point out that there is a high, mediocre, low or zero chance of correlation existing between the two questions. It is important to note that you can never say that the cause of this correlation lies specifically within these questions as more factors can play into the result. Neither can one conclude what this possible correlation would mean (Plooij, 2011). The qualitative data from the open-ended questions of the survey will be used to interpret the results better. Combining all gathered data and the data from the theoretical framework, a conclusion will be drawn.

The results are subdivided by several questions based on my hypotheses:
- 4.1 What are the teachers' opinions on teaching English?
- 4.2 Is a higher proficiency in English associated with more comfortableness in teaching English?
- 4.3 Is a higher proficiency in English associated with a higher motivation for (improving) teaching English?

4 Results

In this section, I first present a brief analysis, of which I will discuss the results of my analysis per hypothesis. Per hypothesis, I will first give the relevant descriptive statistics, report the findings and present my analysis. These analyses are then substantiated with qualitative data. Statements that were formulated negatively, have been recoded for the purpose of consistency. All recoded statements are indicated with a '*'.

4.1 Teachers' opinions on teaching English
Table 4.1.1 presents the results from the Likert scale part of the survey. These outcomes present an overview of the overall attitude of all 44 participants in this study. For purposes of clarity, the statements have been subdivided into four different categories, the latter three of which correspond to my conceptual model presented in Section 2.7. First, the general attitude of teachers towards the English curriculum is presented. The results indicate that almost all teachers recognise the importance of English as a primary school subject (M = 4.318). At the same time, teachers feel that change is needed, as most would like to see the English curriculum shaped differently (M = 3.273). Interestingly, relatively much support is found for the idea of English lessons being taught by a trained professional (M = 3.500), suggesting that teachers are currently not entirely comfortable with teaching English.

General attitudes towards English curriculum		N	M	SD
15	I would prefer to start teaching English sooner than we currently do	44	2.409	1.300
13	I believe that English is an important subject	44	4.318	0.771
20	I would like to see the English curriculum shaped differently	44	3.273	0.997
24	English lessons taught by a trained professional would be a good idea	44	3.500	1.023

Table 4.1.1

This notion is investigated further in the second category of statements, entitled "Proficiency in English". These statements indicate how teachers rate their English level on various factors, such as vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation and overall proficiency. Not entirely surprising in accordance with existing data (Thijs et al., 2011; Oostdam, 2010), I find that teachers are relatively satisfied with their proficiency and pronunciation (M = 3.455 and 3.477, respectively). Interestingly, there are quite some differences in confidence about specific aspects of the English language. Most notably, teachers predominantly feel that their knowledge of grammar is only very slightly sufficient (N = 3.091), while they rate their reading skills the highest (M = 4.068).

Proficiency in English		N	M	SD
2	**I think my English fluency is sufficient ***	44	3.500	1.210
1	I think my English vocabulary is sufficient *	44	3.636	1.080
3	I think my English syntax is sufficient *	44	3.182	1.317
4	I think my English grammar is sufficient *	44	3.091	1.217
5	I think my English listening skills are sufficient *	44	3.909	0.984
6	I think my English reading skills are sufficient *	44	4.068	0.950
2	I think it is easy to teach English *	44	3.273	1.283
3	I am satisfied with my English proficiency	44	3.455	1.266
4	I am satisfied with my English pronunciation	44	3.477	1.171

Table 4.1.1

Figure 4.1.2 shows us the results of question 16, asking which of the following skills the teachers have the most trouble with. These outcomes are in line with the self-reported proficiency statements in table 4.1.1. Again most teachers (18) indicate that they have the most trouble with grammar (40,9 %). None of the teachers states that they struggle with reading, which is again in conformity with table 4.1.1. Interestingly, 12 teachers indicate that they do not have any trouble with any of these skills (27,3 %).
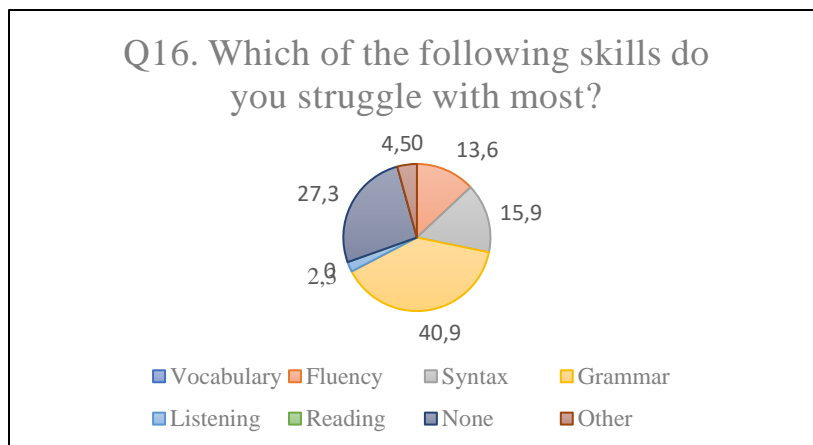
Q16. Which of the following skills do you struggle with most?

4,50 13,6 15,9 40,9 2,3 27,3

Vocabulary Fluency Syntax Grammar Listening Reading None Other

Figure 4.1.2

Moving from the control of the language by teachers to their actual teaching, I find that most teachers do not dislike teaching English (M = 2.160) – and perceive it to be challenging in a negative way (M = 2.409). Moreover, in general, teachers do not agree that with the statements that they "dread teaching English" (M = 2.1), "get nervous when I teach English" (M = 2.3). This could mean that the general teacher population is feeling relatively positive and confident towards teaching English. This is not in line with the only study on a teachers' language anxiety study by Danyal Tum (2014). He argues that many non-native teachers are just as susceptible to foreign language anxiety as inexperienced language learners.

	Comfortableness with teaching English	N	M	SD
1	**I do not like teaching English ***	44	2.160	1.055
7	I think that teaching English is challenging in a negative way *	44	2.409	1.064
5	I get nervous when I have to teach English	44	2.3	1.179
6	I dread teaching English	44	2.1	1.146
8	I would prefer not to teach English at all	44	1.795	1.133
9	The worst part about teaching English is talking in English	44	2.386	1.251
10	Teaching English is no problem for me as long as I don't have to talk English	44	2.114	1.262

Table 4.1.1

When looking at the teachers' motivation, I find that they are pretty motivated to improve both their proficiency level (M = 3.841) and their English lessons (M = 3.909). Furthermore, most teachers are, in general, open to suggestions (M = 3.932) and training (M = 3.659), suggesting that although most teachers seem to be relatively satisfied with their proficiency (M = 3.455), they still see room for improvement as they would like to achieve more in their English lessons (M = 3.841).

	Motivation for (improving) teaching English	N	M	SD
16	**I am motivated to improve my English lessons**	44	3.909	0.741
17	I am motivated to improve my English proficiency level	44	3.841	1.055
18	I am open to suggestions that can improve my English education	44	3.932	0.728
19	I am open towards after-school trainings concerning English education (didactics and grammar/vocabulary)	44	3.659	1.098
21	I would like to achieve more in my English lessons	44	3.841	0.745

While these results are highly useful in giving a clear overview of the main attitudes of teachers, we are still unable to check the relationships between the different aspects. In the subdivision, I will address this in more detail.

4.2 Is a higher proficiency in English associated with more comfortableness in teaching English?

Table 4.2 presents the results from the correlations between two different sets of data, combining proficiency and comfortableness in teaching English. As can be seen, there is at least a low correlation between all of the data, suggesting that there is indeed a link between a higher proficiency in English and the comfort with which one might teach English. Most noticeable are the moderately high correlations between "I dread teaching English" and "Vocabulary*" ($r = 0.717$), "The worst part of teaching English is talking in English" and "Vocabulary" ($r = 0.730$), "The worst part of teaching English is talking in English" and "Fluency" ($r = 0.733$) and "I dread teaching English" and "fluency" ($r = 0.696$). From those numbers, it can be concluded that vocabulary and fluency seem to influence the comfortableness most, as those correlations are relatively the highest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr><th></th><th></th><th colspan="6">Proficiency in English</th></tr>
<tr><th></th><th></th><th>Vocabulary</th><th>Fluency</th><th>Syntax</th><th>Grammar</th><th>Listening</th><th>Reading</th></tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr><td rowspan="7">Comfortableness with teaching English</td><td>I don't like teaching English *</td><td>-0.478</td><td>-0.537</td><td>-0.456</td><td>-0.537</td><td>-0.344</td><td>-0.498</td></tr>
<tr><td>I think that teaching English is challenging in a negative way *</td><td>-0.212</td><td>-0.379</td><td>-0.254</td><td>-0.281</td><td>-0.230</td><td>-0.328</td></tr>
<tr><td>I get nervous when I have to teach English</td><td>0.682</td><td>0.668</td><td>0.537</td><td>0.615</td><td>0.383</td><td>0.492</td></tr>
<tr><td>I dread teaching English</td><td>0.717</td><td>0.696</td><td>0.580</td><td>0.608</td><td>0.444</td><td>0.499</td></tr>
<tr><td>I would prefer not to teach English at all</td><td>0.499</td><td>0.585</td><td>0.427</td><td>0.476</td><td>0.393</td><td>0.441</td></tr>
<tr><td>The worst part of teaching English is talking in English</td><td>0.730</td><td>0.733</td><td>0.577</td><td>0.631</td><td>0.463</td><td>0.547</td></tr>
<tr><td>Teaching English is no problem for me as long as I don't have to talk English</td><td>0.566</td><td>0.585</td><td>0.447</td><td>0.492</td><td>0.235</td><td>0.337</td></tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2

These numbers are corroborated by the qualitative data that was also collected in the survey. On the one hand, several teachers mentioned: "*My sentences are very rarely correct, and I am aware of that. Because of this, I do not like teaching English, as I would like to teach the children correctly*", "*I believe that my English should be perfect, as I am their example. Only that way will the students get good input. Because I am not fast enough with my grammar, I make mistakes. My English is above average, but not good enough still*", and "*I speak too little English to feel comfortable enough. I lack vocabulary and also syntax. I would like to feel more comfortable in this*".

On the other hand, teachers mentioned that: "*I master English at a high level (vwo-6/C1 level) and believe that this is more than enough to teach the students at a primary school*" and "*Teaching English*

is fine. I like doing it although it is not automatism. I am not a specialist, but I am motivated to challenge my students and improve their level". This data would suggest that when a teacher is uncomfortable, they are more likely to have difficulties teaching the subject. In contract, teachers that are more comfortable with the language teach English more easily.

4.3 Is a higher proficiency in English associated with a higher motivation for (improving) teaching English?

Table 4.3 shows the results between the statements concerning 'Comfortableness with teaching English' and 'Motivation for improving teaching English' are relatively low, meaning that there are none to weak correlations between the two statements. Most noticeable in this table is the correlation between "I am motivated to improve my English proficiency level" and "vocabulary" ($r = 0.030$), "fluency" ($r = 0.046$), "syntax" ($r = 0.072$) and "grammar" ($r = 0.012$), which could indicate that it is not the case that teachers that are less knowledgeable on English necessarily want to improve their teaching language skills. Surprisingly enough, I find that "vocabulary" and "I am motivated to improve my English lesson" ($r = 0.449$) are an exception and have a pretty high correlation compared to the other statements, which could mean that the level of vocabulary is a factor in wanting to improve the teaching of English lessons.

		Proficiency in English					
		Vocabulary	Fluency	Syntax	Grammar	Listening	Reading
Motivation for (improving) teaching English	I am motivated to improve my English lessons	0.449	0.155	0.089	0.087	0.339	0.339
	I am motivated to improve my English proficiency level	0.030	0.046	0.072	0.012	0.187	0.173
	I am open to suggestions that can improve my English education	0.204	0.277	0.110	0.138	0.283	0.276
	I am open towards after-school trainings concerning English education (didactics and grammar/vocabulary)	-0.087	-0.079	-0.181	-0.098	0.014	0.067
	I would like to achieve more in my English lessons	-0.045	-0.013	-0.112	-0,061	0.043	0.049

Table 4.3

The quantitative data of this survey was interspersed with quantitative data, which might enlighten these results. Many teachers state that they are not 100% happy with the way the subject is taught right now.

"*The lessons could be more focused on speaking/listening and reading and writing*", "*I would like to teach the subjects several times a week*", "*I believe that the subject should get more attention, just like a lot of other subjects. There is just not enough time*" and "*The English lessons could be a lot better. The way these lessons are shaped should be better*", are just a few of the likeminded statements these teachers have written down. These declarations from teachers suggest that although there is a need for improvement, this has little to do with teaching the English language itself and more with factors surrounding the subject.

5 Conclusions

In this research, the correlation between a teachers' proficiency towards English and his/her attitude towards teaching English has been studied. These aspects have been subdivided into three categories: The teachers' opinion regarding English, the teachers' proficiency and the teachers' comfort with the English language. The most important findings of this study will be discussed per sub-question to answer the main question of this research: "To what extent does the teachers' proficiency in English influence the teachers' attitude towards teaching English?".

5.1 What are the teachers' opinions on teaching English?

To answer the first sub-question, several survey questions concerning teachers' opinions were selected and researched. These questions were then subdivided into 'General attitudes towards the English curriculum', 'Proficiency in English', 'Comfortableness with teaching English' and 'Motivation for (improving) teaching English'. The general attitudes towards the English curriculum are in line with previous studies (Thijs et al., 2011; Oostdam, 2010). They stated that 92% of the teachers believe English to be an important subject, conform question 14.13 of the survey (M = 4.318). When looking at the questions categorised as 'Comfortableness with teaching English', it again becomes clear that the general teacher population seems to have a relatively positive and confident attitude towards teaching English. However, this does not entirely conform with the study that observed teachers' language anxiety when teaching (Tum, 2014) and the qualitative data from the survey, as many of the teachers agree that their proficiency is sufficient enough to be able to teach, but that many of them experience insecurities in certain areas. This difference between the qualitative and quantitative data can be explained by Tum's (2014) findings that many teachers experience anxiety when teaching a foreign language, without this being a dominant factor. However, more than half (69,6%) of these teachers are motivated to improve their proficiency, and 71,8 % is motivated to improve their English lessons. 65,2% of the teachers are open to training, which is interesting when looking at the study of Oostdam (2010), who states that initially, only 14% of the teachers followed training when EIBO was first introduced. This difference might have to do with the large gap of time between both studies.

5.2 Is a higher proficiency in English associated with more comfortableness in teaching English?

To be able to answer this second question, the proficiency in English – which consists of vocabulary, fluency, syntax, grammar, listening skills, and reading skills – was correlated with the statements concerning the comfortableness of the teachers when teaching English. Between all of the statements a correlation was found, ranging from ($r = 0.235$) to ($r = 0.733$). The most noticeable correlations were found between 'vocabulary', 'fluency' and 'grammar', and the statements 'I get nervous when I have to teach English', 'I dread teaching English' and 'The worst part of teaching English is talking in English', suggesting that there is indeed a link between the

aforementioned factors. This is not a surprising outcome when looking at the study of Geurts and Hemker (2012). They state that more than three-quarters of the teachers (76%) have had minimal education in didactics and the skills necessary for teaching English. As a result, many havo and mbo students have developed a fear of public speaking because they feel they do not master the English language enough (Van Gool, 2006). One might conclude from both the literature and the gathered data that it is very likely that teachers who get nervous tend to see themselves inept in their proficiency skills, in particular vocabulary, fluency and grammar ($r = 0.682$) ($r = 0.66$) ($r = 0.615$). One might also include that when a teacher feels incompetent in their proficiency, they will most likely dread teaching English ($r = 0.717$) ($r = 0.696$) ($r = 0.608$). The same goes for talking in English in the classroom and proficiency ($r = 0.730$) ($r = 0.733$) ($r = 0.631$). Interestingly enough, although vocabulary seems to play a big role in the teachers' comfort with the English language, this is one of the very few skills that none of the teachers struggled with most according to table 4.1.2, conform question 17. This could indicate that although it is uncommon for a teacher to struggle most with vocabulary, it greatly influences the teachers' feelings towards the subject. Based on the above, the hypothesis 'A higher comfortableness with English is positively associated with the motivation for teaching English' can be accepted.

5.3 Is a higher proficiency in English associated with a higher motivation for (improving) teaching English?

To answer the third sub-question, proficiency in English – which consists of vocabulary, fluency, syntax, grammar, listening skills, and reading skills – was correlated with the motivation for (improving) teaching English. No correlations were found between the different factors and statements, which could indicate that if a teacher is less knowledgeable on the English subject, he does not necessarily want to improve his teaching language skills. This can be explained when looking at the qualitative data. Many teachers agree that the English lessons could be much improved, but the reasons they raise are not concerning the teachers' language skills, but subjects like 'more time', 'rearranging the curriculum' and 'more attention to interaction'. According to Bouman (1998) and Genesee (2014), the added value of this is clear. They state that 'learning by doing' and 'total language immersion' is easily achievable when teaching and very effective. Nonetheless, only 22% of the teachers' time is spent on conversing with students (Heersers et al., 2008). Teachers seem to be aware of this as 71,7 % of the teachers are open to improving English education. Because most of the reasons for improvement are found outside the proficiency zone, this might explain the low correlation between the two aspects. However, there are two exceptions: there were several mediocre correlations found in the statements 'I am motivated to improve my English lessons' and 'I am open to suggestions that can improve my English education'. The highest correlation can be found between 'I am motivated to improve my English lessons' and 'vocabulary' s($r = 0.449$). This could mean that the vocabulary level influences the extent of a teachers' motivation to improve their lessons. Based on the above, the hypothesis 'A higher (self-reported) proficiency in English is positively associated with the motivation for (improving) teaching English' can therefore neither be accepted nor rejected, as there is indeed a slight correlation between some statements. The overall motivation for improving English comes, however, from factors outside of the teachers' proficiency.

5.4 To what extent does the teachers' proficiency in English influence the teachers' motivation for teaching English?

The conclusion can be drawn that there is indeed a relationship between the teachers' proficiency and the teachers' motivation for teaching English, as there were clear correlations found between the different statements. The way teachers view English lessons is directly influenced by factors such as

vocabulary and fluency. Therefore, it can be concluded that the better a teacher has mastered the language, the more relaxed and comfortable this teacher will feel when teaching English. The opposite can also be claimed: The lesser the teachers' proficiency, the more anxiety and dread the teachers are likely to experience when teaching English. This relation is less present between the teachers' attitude and their willingness to improve their lessons, as their motivations lie outside of the proficiency context.

6 Discussion

This research has a few limitations. First of all, this research was done on a very small scale. In total, only 44 teachers participated in the survey, giving a good indication of the outcome. However, the results of research done on a much larger scale would be more valid and reliable. Furthermore, the data used in the theoretical framework is somewhat outdated. This has to do with the overall lack of more recent publications. It is, therefore, possible that some of the information is not applicable anymore to the data generated, which could pull some of the drawn conclusions into question. Furthermore, I have analysed the results of this study as 'The better a teacher has mastered the language, the more relaxed and comfortable this teacher will feel when teaching English'. However, the data could also be interpreted differently, reversing the two variables: 'Because the teacher is feeling more relaxed and comfortable while teaching the language, the easier he/she will master the language', which would be in line with Krashens' affective filter hypothesis (1981). This could affect the outcome of this study. This study gives cause to investigate further what variable can influence the motivation to improve teaching English, as barely any correlations were found between the aforementioned and the teachers' proficiency.

7 Recommendations

Based on the results, a few recommendations can be made. The better a teacher has mastered the language, the more relaxed and comfortable this teacher will feel when teaching English is the outcome of this study. It is, therefore, important that teachers get enough opportunities to master the language. Mastering a language can be achieved in two ways: learning and acquiring (Krashen, 1981). Learning a language can be accomplished by following after-school training (Oostdam & Van Toorenburg, 2002). Acquiring the language means that exposure to the language is essential, as natural conversations full of irregularities and interesting structures give you a more wholesome vocabulary and syntax (Corda et al., 2012; Abukhattala, 2012).

When a teacher does not master the language as proficiently as he/she might like to, it is likely that he/she will not feel comfortable when teaching in a foreign language. The following suggestions can be used as support when feeling insecure about English teaching.
- Teaching in themes: Thematic units revolve around the same topic or subject, so students (and teachers in this case) can focus more on content and communication rather than language structure (Shin Kang, 2006).
- Using the first language: Instead of talking only in English, it is acceptable to explain something in your first language every now and then. When a word is too complicated in English, it is perfectly acceptable to pronounce that word in the first language (Shin Kang, 2006). Not only is this easier for the teacher, it is also a great way to keep students with low proficiency motivated (Shin Kang, 2006).

· Using technology when teaching English: Computer-based activities provide learners with rapid information and appropriate materials (Tomlison, 2009; Gençlter, 2015). Internet materials motivate learners to learn more (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Using technology is very effective for students to learn a foreign language. This could take away some of the teachers' pressure and the necessity to provide the students with perfect input. My research shows that 81,8% of the teachers have a positive attitude towards using technology in their lessons.

Last but not least, the studies on the teachers' fluency (Burstall et al., 1974; Koster, 1986), which are described in paragraph 2.5, state that although fluency is important when teaching a foreign language, the mastery of didactics outweigh the importance of the teachers' fluency, therefore possibly releasing some of the teachers' pressure.

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Appendixes

Appendix A – Survey Questions (English Version)

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. What is the name of the school you currently work at?
4. Which grade(s) do you teach?
5. How long have you been in practice?
6. How long have you been working at this school?
7. Which language(s) do you speak at home?
8. Which language(s) do you speak at least once a week (outside of school hours)?
9. Which language(s) do you speak fluently?
10. How many hours per week do you spend on English in your classroom?
11. How many hours per week should you spend on English in your classroom?
12. What books/materials do you work with?

13. How important is English education in your opinion? Please clarify.
14. Statements:
    1. I like teaching English
    2. I find that it is hard to teach English
    3. I am satisfied with my English proficiency
    4. I am satisfied with my English pronunciation
    5. I get nervous when I have to teach English
    6. I dread teaching English
    7. I think that teaching English is challenging in a positive way
    8. I would prefer not to teach English at all
    9. The worst part about teaching English is talking in English
    10. Teaching English is no problem for me as long as I don't have to talk English
    11. I always teach English in Dutch
    12. I believe that English should be taught in English
    13. I believe that English is an important subject
    14. I would like to spend more time on English per week
    15. I would prefer to start teaching English sooner than we currently do
    16. I am motivated to improve my English lessons
    17. I am motivated to improve my English proficiency level
    18. I am open to suggestions that can improve my English education
    19. I am open towards after-school trainings concerning English education (both didactics and grammar/vocabulary)
    20. I would like to see the English curriculum shaped differently
    21. I would like to achieve more in my English
    22. My English fluency withholds me from teaching good English lessons
    23. If I were to have an intern, I would let him/her teach the English lessons
    24. English lessons taught by a trained professional would be a good idea
    25. Younger teachers are better suited for teaching English than older teachers
15. Proficiency statements:
    1. I find that my English vocabulary is insufficient

2. I find that my English fluency is insufficient

3. I find that my English syntax is insufficient

4. I find that my English grammar is insufficient

5. I find that my English listening skills are insufficient

6. I find that my English reading skills are insufficient

16. Which of the following skills do you struggle with most?

Fluency, vocabulary, syntax, grammar, listening skills, reading skills, none of the above, other

17. Please clarify your given answer to question 16

18. How would you describe your English skills/level? Please clarify.

19. What is your general attitude towards English education? Please clarify.

20. How satisfied are you with your current English education? Please clarify.

21. How satisfied are you with the books/materials you are currently using? Please clarify.

22. What problems do you run into most when you are teaching English? Please clarify.

23. What would you like to see changed in the current way your school approaches English education?

24. What would help you to improve your current English education? Please clarify.

25. Are you open to suggestions that might improve your English lessons?

26. What is your view towards using IT-materials when teaching English? Please clarify.

Appendix B – Survey Results

If you would like to request the results from the survey, please email marilene.vd.herik@live.nl