

## Identifying the proficiency level of primary English language teachers' productive skills from *Kurikulum Merdeka* and CEFR

### Mengidentifikasi tingkat kemahiran keterampilan produktif guru Bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar dari Kurikulum Merdeka dan CEFR

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#### KEYWORDS

primary English language teachers, language proficiency level, *Kurikulum Merdeka*, CEFR.

#### ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the language proficiency level of primary English language teachers' (PELTs) productive skills (speaking and writing) analyzed using the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) and *Kurikulum Merdeka*. As a foreign language in Indonesia, English language proficiency among PELTs is crucial to determine the success of the learning process in a classroom. Furthermore, PELTs should also possess adequate language proficiency to communicate effectively with students in any situation. However, several local context studies show the low language proficiency level possessed by PELTs. The low proficiency level was mostly gained through general English tests, for example TOEFL, which focuses on teachers' receptive skills (listening and reading) and structure. A qualitative approach and case study research design were employed in this study. It was identified that the majority of teachers' productive skills proficiency level is categorized into the B1/B2 level of CEFR. Additionally, the mixed level of proficiency among PELTs is still apparent which can create issues regarding primary-students' language development and the standard of proficiency level that PELTs should be. Therefore, by involving subject teachers' communities and the government, a standard of language proficiency for PELTs should be developed.

#### KATA KUNCI

guru bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar, tingkat kemahiran berbahasa, Kurikulum Merdeka, CEFR.

#### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tingkat kemahiran berbahasa guru Bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar di bidang keterampilan produktif (berbicara dan menulis) yang dianalisis menggunakan *Common European Framework of References* (CEFR) dan Kurikulum Merdeka. Sebagai bahasa asing di Indonesia, kemahiran berbahasa Inggris di antara guru Bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar sangat penting untuk menentukan keberhasilan dalam proses pembelajaran di dalam kelas. Selain itu, guru Bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar juga harus memiliki kemahiran berbahasa yang cukup untuk berkomunikasi secara efektif dengan siswa di berbagai situasi. Namun, beberapa studi berkonteks lokal menunjukkan rendahnya tingkat kemahiran berbahasa oleh guru bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar. Tingkat kemahiran yang rendah mayoritas diketahui dari uji bahasa Inggris umum seperti TOEFL yang fokus pada kemampuan reseptif guru (menyimak dan membaca) dan struktur. Pendekatan kualitatif dan desain penelitian studi kasus digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Ditemukan bahwa mayoritas tingkat kemahiran keterampilan produktif berbahasa Inggris guru Bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar dikategorikan ke dalam tingkat B1/B2 menurut CEFR. Selain itu, beragamnya tingkat kemahiran berbahasa Inggris guru tingkat dasar masih kentara sehingga dapat mengakibatkan masalah pada perkembangan berbahasa siswa tingkat dasar dan pengukuran standar tingkat kemahiran berbahasa guru Bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar. Oleh karena itu, dengan melibatkan komunitas guru dan pemerintah, sebuah standar untuk tingkat kemahiran guru bahasa Inggris tingkat dasar harus dikembangkan.

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## Introduction

Language proficiency for primary English language teachers (later referred to as PELTs) is one of the important aspects in achieving classroom objectives and helping students effectively learn the language. English teachers are considered proficient in the language when they can carry out tasks that require effective and efficient use of English. The act of using the language not only covers the classroom language but also applies to any situation. As a consequence, the term "language proficiency" among teachers refers to the ability of English teachers to effectively use the English language throughout the entirety of the teaching and learning activities that they participate in with their students.

Furthermore, language proficiency among PELTs has become a significant part that can provide a basis for teachers' professional confidence in their ability to teach English (Murdoch, 1994; Spolsky, 1989; Richards et al., 2013). This notion is also true for PELTs in Indonesia. Holding the status of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, teachers' language proficiency plays a vital role in determining the success of the learning process, especially in primary-level classes.

In Indonesia, however, PELTs' proficiency level is not officially and nationally documented or recorded. The unavailability of a national standard or document for PELTs' language proficiency makes it vague to determine the standard of language proficiency that PELTs should possess. In addition, it is much harder for the government to standardize the requirements for recruiting well-proficient teachers.

Even though there is no documented standard for PELTs' language proficiency level available yet, some bigger projects have shown the predominance of teachers with varied and low levels of language proficiency (Hamied, 2013; Meisani et al., 2020; Musthafa & Hamied, 2014; Zein, 2016; 2017a). Other studies have figured out that the teachers' level of proficiency in Indonesia is deemed inadequately qualified or lacking to teach English to primary-level students (Lie, 2007; Marcellino, 2005; Renandya et al., 2018; Supriyatna, 2011) because most PELTs are classroom teachers who graduated from non-English majors and have little TEFL knowledge and qualifications (Apriliana, 2018; Dewi et al. 2020; Meisani et al., 2020; Zein, 2017b). The latter finding is also supported by an investigation by Yuwono and Harbon (2010, as cited in Mutiah et al., 2020), who discovered that most Indonesian PELTs lack a background education or experience in English language education. Consequently, if teachers do not get relevant ELT knowledge covering TEYL, they will have low proficiency in both linguistics and pedagogical skills.

Sofwan and Habibi (2015) incorporated the English Proficiency Test (EPT), which is equivalent to TOEFL, to figure out the level of proficiency among PELTs in Jambi. The test revealed that the mean score of the test was 363.06, which is below the expected norm. In a similar vein, a massive study was conducted by Sikki et al. (2013) on 200 PELTs based in 10 districts in South Sulawesi. The study employed a professional competence test, as one of the data collection tools, to measure PELTs' English proficiency levels. The test result suggested that 52% of teachers are placed in the Poor and Fair categories. Unfortunately, there is no further explanation of what kind of professional competence test was employed in the study.

The use of TOEFL or TOEFL-like tests in finding out PELTs' level of proficiency is not sufficient as the test only explores teachers' productive skills briefly. The TOEFL test measures only language users' receptive skills aspects. In reality, productive skills, or writing and speaking, are often valued as determining language users' mastery, including teachers and students. The skills are regarded as significant in the classroom context and real-life situations. Therefore, this study utilized the BETIC test from WELTS focusing on PELTs' speaking and writing abilities. When teachers are proficient in speaking and writing, they will become confident and capable of using English as the classroom language for instructional purposes (Meisani et al., 2020).

Despite the two skills being different, Harmer (2001) identifies several key similarities. These similarities include the need to construct language, follow the rules and norms, utilize various styles depending on the context, communicate with an audience, and use techniques such as improvising and paraphrasing in order to cope with difficulty. These two skills are significant since speaking and writing can better generate accurate and fluent speech for effective classroom communication. Moreover, speaking and writing skills can help teachers teach different text types easier. Thus, these similarities are interesting in identifying teachers' productive skills proficiency level.

In the Indonesian context, the language proficiency level of Primary English teachers can be measured and identified through the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) and *Kurikulum Merdeka*. CEFR is one of the most established language proficiency measurements that have been adopted globally. The Indonesian government adopted CEFR in *Kurikulum Merdeka* as a language proficiency measurement for students. *Kurikulum Merdeka* was introduced in 2022, amidst the pandemic of COVID-19, as a solution to maximize national education, especially in the English subject. The adoption of CEFR in *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be seen in its Learning Phases (Table 1) emphasizing English communicative competence through various text genres (genre-based approach) and six language skills.

*Kurikulum Merdeka* expects students to achieve Level B1 of CEFR after they graduate high school. Level B1 in the curriculum requires students to be able to: (1) maintain interaction and explain something in many different situations with clear articulation; (2) convey main ideas to be comprehensively expressed; and (3) maintain communication despite gaps in between.

A further distinction between *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the previous curriculum is that *Kurikulum Merdeka* now employs 6 (six) Learning Phases, whereas the previous curriculum utilized the terms Basic and Core Competencies.

Table 1. Learning phases in *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Kepala Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022).

No	Phases	Focus	Grades
1	Phase A	Introducing the English language and developing oral proficiency.	Grades 1-2
2	Phase B	Focusing on the English oral language but begins with the introduction of written language. Teachers' assistance is significant in developing students' oral and written English competencies.	Grades 3-4
3	Phase C	Concentrating on oral and written English competencies.	Grades 5-6
4	Phase D	Strengthening and improving students' ability to communicate effectively in oral and written English.	Grades 7-9
5	Phase E	Focusing on strengthening oral and written English competencies equivalent	Grade 10
6	Phase F	to Level B1 of CEFR.	Grades 11-12

The present study focuses on primary-level education; therefore, the phases being used are Phases A–C. Grades 1 and 2 heavily highlight students’ oral development with considerable support in their writing development through simple activities such as tracing or copying. Meanwhile, grade 3 and 4 teachers will incorporate more writing activities through prompts using pictures, graphs, or shapes. Students in grades 5 and 6 start to improve their oral and written proficiencies through the processes.

In the primary-level learning phases, it is clearly seen that the use of pictures in the classroom is heavily conducted in the classroom. This is related to the two additional skills mentioned beforehand: presenting and viewing, in addition to listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Incorporating presenting and viewing skills in *Kurikulum Merdeka* indicates that teachers must understand multimodality. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) inform that multimodality refers to someone’s capability of communicating with various modes at the same time. Therefore, teachers’ ability to transfer and translate multimodalities into the learning process should align with their excellent proficiency level. Multimodality is in line with the process in which people use many semiotic modes to make meanings (Iedema, 2003). When PELTs are not good at multimodality, it will be hard for students to achieve the learning objectives set in the curriculum (O’Halloran & Lim-fei, 2011). Therefore, viewing and representing skills in the curriculum make it even more crucial for teachers to possess language proficiency that includes multimodality.

As noted earlier, CEFR in *Kurikulum Merdeka* serves as the language proficiency equivalence for students. Students are expected to be at level B1 of CEFR when they graduate high school. This raises another issue, however. If students are expected to be equivalent to the B1 level of CEFR, what level of proficiency PELTs should achieve since there is no clear description of this question. Even though the equivalence is only for students, it is worth assuming that English teachers should at least be a level higher (B2) than the level expected from the students. More detailed information regarding the comparison and equivalence of learning phases and CEFR can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The comparison and equivalence of learning phases in *Kurikulum Merdeka* and CEFR

No	Phases	Students	Teachers
1	Phase A		
2	Phase B	A1	A2
3	Phase C		
4	Phase D	A2	B1
5	Phase E	B1	B2
6	Phase F		

Table 2 illustrates the possible comparison and equivalence of learning phases and CEFR. After completing primary school, students are required to achieve an A1 level of CEFR, and the teachers should at least possess or comprehend the A2 level of proficiency. Phase D is dedicated to 7 to 9 graders. The projected proficiency level for phase D is A2, while teachers should be at B1. Phases E and F, which are for 10-12 grade students, require students to reach the expected level of B1 and teachers’ proficiency level should be one level higher than the students’, that is, in B2 level.

The above assumption departs from Vygotsky’s theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests teachers are the “more knowledgeable others” when it comes to teaching their students. In addition to that, teachers should have sufficient

proficiency that highlights the significance of teachers' knowledge of the language (deconstructing texts) and how English is used to encourage effective and conducive classroom practice (Cahn & Renandya, 2017; Myhill et al., 2013; Damayanti, 2019).

Introduced in 2001, CEFR details what language learners must learn to communicate and act effectively. Language culture is also described. The Framework also sets proficiency levels to measure learners' development throughout their education and life (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR gives a full list of important ability descriptors that can be used to measure language proficiency. These descriptors are in the form of "Can-Do" statements, which help users show how well they know a certain category. CEFR has 6 (six) different language proficiency levels, with their general descriptors represented by A1-A2 as Basic Users, B1-B2 as Independent Users, and C1-C2 as Proficient Users (Council of Europe, 2001).

Incorporating CEFR and *Kurikulum Merdeka* in developing PELTs' language proficiency levels will help support teachers' role in strategizing learning activities, ensuring students' comprehension in and out of the classroom, and customizing learning materials to students' needs (Wilson et al., 2018). If PELTs have the expected proficiency level, it will be much easier to know how specific information is represented and how to teach it, as well as to understand learning challenges and how students see specific content (Fernandez, 2014).

As mentioned previously, the expected level of proficiency is only put on students. On this basis, teachers are highly suggested to be at a level higher than the students. As more knowledgeable others, teachers should understand what the B1 level of CEFR in the curriculum expects and they should possess excellent proficiency to teach in the classroom. Furthermore, some previous studies employed TOEFL as one of the tools in determining PELTs' proficiency level.

From the background issues and aforementioned gaps, this present study aims to identify the proficiency level of speaking and writing skills among primary English language teachers in Bandung. The identification is analyzed using CEFR and *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

## Method

### *Research design*

The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study research design. As a part of this qualitative approach, a case study methodology was implemented to better comprehend and clarify the proficiency level of PELTs' productive skills seen from *Kurikulum Merdeka* and CEFR. This aligns with Yin's (2009) suggestion about the interconnections and causal factors of the case under investigation.

### *Participants of the study*

As a whole, this study's sample comprises 20 in-service and pre-service teachers in Bandung. There are 13 primary-level teachers and 7 pre-service teachers who partook in the research. In detail, the category of primary-level teachers belongs to those who teach elementary and junior high schools, as the study focuses on analyzing PELTs' proficiency using *Kurikulum Merdeka* learning phases for primary-level teachers

(Phases A-D). Additionally, the pre-service teachers belong to college students who took or are taking the Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) course in their study program. In short, purposive sampling was utilized for the research sample. The selection of research participants for a study using a variety of specified criteria is an example of the process known as purposeful sampling, which is used to ensure that the goals of the study are met (Ary et al., 2010).

#### Data collection and analysis

In collecting the data, all teachers had to take a proficiency test conducted by BETIC from WELTS. The skills being tested were speaking and writing as the focus of the study. The selection of these two skills was based on the justification that the two skills determine classroom language aspects in effective and facilitating classrooms (Richards, 2017).

There were five questions in the speaking section. The questions were about introducing themselves, sharing past experiences, sharing their opinions on certain topics (e.g. contribution to global warming campaign and technology development), and describing the future. All participants were required to speak for at least 2 minutes for each number. The speaking test was scored based on fluency and coherence, pronunciation, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy. The maximum score for the speaking test is 150.

Meanwhile, the writing test consisted of two numbers. The teachers were asked to describe a picture and respond to an article about mental health. Each number required them to write at least 2000 or 5000 characters maximum. The test was scored based on task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy. The maximum score for the writing test is 120. The results of PELTs' productive skills tests were converted to CEFR using the BETIC Comparison Chart of English Certificates to European Levels (Figure 1). The CEFR equivalence was justified using learning phases for primary-level education in *Kurikulum Merdeka* and translated into what CEFR expects teachers to be capable of doing and possessing. The findings were presented qualitatively to identify their speaking and writing proficiency level.

**Comparison chart of English certificates to European levels**

IELTS	TOEFL iBT	TOEFL PBT	BETIC	TOEIC	CEFR
9	118-120	645-677	Level 6	950-990	C2
8	110-117	610-644	Level 6	900-949	C2
7.5	102-109	581-609	Level 5	840-899	C1
7	94-101	560-580	Level 5	780-839	C1
6.5	79-93	546-559	Level 4	735-779	B2
6	60-78	530-545	Level 4	685-734	B2
5.5	42-59	511-529	Level 3	600-684	B1
5	35-41	490-510	Level 3	550-599	B1
4.5	32-34	450-489	Level 3	450-549	B1
3.5	27-31	338-449	Level 2	225-445	A2
2.5	19-26	311-337	Level 2	175-220	A2
1.5	0-18	310	Level 1	0-170	A1

  

BETIC Level Indicator	
Level 6	860 - 1000
Level 5	730 - 896
Level 4	595 - 786
Level 3	430 - 631
Level 2	155 - 476
Level 1	0 - 251

  

BETIC LEVEL SCORE				
ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST LEVEL				
	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
Level 6	320 - 350	340 - 380	130 - 150	110 - 120
Level 5	280 - 319	300 - 339	110 - 129	100 - 109
Level 4	230 - 279	240 - 299	85 - 109	80 - 99
Level 3	180 - 229	180 - 239	60 - 84	60 - 79
Level 2	100 - 179	90 - 179	30 - 59	35 - 59
Level 1	0 - 99	0 - 89	0 - 29	0 - 34

Ann Finch  
Director of WELTS, Canada

Figure 1. BETIC comparison chart of English Certificates to European Levels

## Results and discussion

The result shows that the proficiency level among teachers is mixed. The levels are categorized based on CEFR Levels of Proficiency: Basic Users, Independent Users, and Proficient Users. The detailed result can be seen in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

Table 3. Teachers' writing proficiency level.

No	Participants	Writing Test	CEFR Equivalence
1	P1	67	B1
2	P2	47	A2
3	P3	68	B1
4	P4	82	B2
5	P5	65	B1
6	P6	59	A2
7	P7	60	B1
8	P8	81	B2
9	P9	60	B1
10	P10	100	C1
11	P11	65	B1
12	P12	88	B2
13	P13	67	B1
14	P14	55	A2
15	P15	62	B1
16	P16	60	B1
17	P17	75	B1
18	P18	100	C1
19	P19	74	B1
20	P20	78	B1

In the writing test, the majority of the teachers are categorized into Independent Users. In a more detailed result, 12 teachers (60%) at the B1 level for the writing test and 3 teachers (15%) at the B2 level for the writing test. The Basic User teachers of level A2 of CEFR are 3 teachers (15%). Only two teachers (10%) got the C1 level in the writing test.

Table 4. Teachers' speaking proficiency level.

No	Participants	Speaking Test	CEFR Equivalence
1	P1	82	B1
2	P2	80	B1
3	P3	83	B1
4	P4	117	C1
5	P5	87	B2
6	P6	70	B1
7	P7	70	B1
8	P8	86	B2
9	P9	55	A2
10	P10	88	B2
11	P11	75	B1
12	P12	100	B2
13	P13	81	B1
14	P14	45	A2
15	P15	73	B1
16	P16	47	A2
17	P17	87	B2
18	P18	100	B2
19	P19	79	B1
20	P20	35	A2

Meanwhile, the speaking test result shows a similar trend of being categorized as Independent User teachers. There are 9 teachers (45%) at the B1 level for the speaking test and 6 teachers (30%) at the B2 level for the speaking test. In the Basic User

teacher's category, 4 teachers (20%) belong to the A2 level in the speaking test. Only one teacher (5%) got the C1 level (Proficient User) in the speaking test.

The finding supports several studies that found the diverse proficiency level among PELTs. The different proficiency level among PELTs has been an ongoing issue, as mentioned by Hamied (2013), Meisani et al. (2020), Sikki et al. (2013), and Sofwan and Habibi (2015). The different levels of proficiency will affect teachers' performance in the classroom. Possessing a standardized language proficiency level will allow teachers to deliver materials more smoothly and can easily help improve their English language command to fulfill the pedagogical responsibilities and offer adequate linguistic support to the students (Renandya et al., 2018). This will reinforce that a teacher's ability to engage and communicate with students should be sufficient and standardized in the classroom.

Table 5. Excerpt samples of PELTs' writing

Partic- ipants	CEFR Writ- ing Level	Writing Excerpts	Text Type
<b>P6</b>	A2	<i>I see so many garbage, and it could be a chemical and dangerous waste that spread on the land. It consist vary of garbage or waste. There is one person maybe he is a scientist who take a research of it.</i>	Description
<b>P14</b>	A2	<i>Mental illness issue is famous in this era because majority of people can get stress easily, like because of work or study or life.</i>	Discussion
<b>P1</b>	B1	<i>This picture reminds me about Wall-E movie that people in the future will be go from the earth and move to another planet because people always produce plastic everyday. People wanna something instant which they think that's modern thing. People don't wanna bring friendly stuff if they wanna buy something like foods, coffee, fashion. Besides plastic, there's also another thing which will be a trash, for example foods. Here especially in some modern city in Indonesia, if people go to the restaurant and they can't eat all the food. They will leave it or they throw it as a trash. But the oposite in west country and European country, if they go to the restaurant, if they can't eat all of the food they will ask the staff to wrap it or they wrap it by themselves and take it to home. It is good thing because it can remove trash production.</i>	Description
<b>P12</b>	B2	<i>Now what we can do as community members to help or reduce the mental illness condition? We can begin from ourself and our nearest family and friends, we have to pay more attention to ourself, family members, friends and neighbours and listen more to their problems, give best solutions, do not judge, do not put your feet to others' shoes. Other way is creating or joining a community centre, it is a place where we can share the problems we have, get some solutions from other people, at least we don't keep problems alone and have community to talk to. If the symptoms still happen, visit psychologist or counsellors to get help and medication.</i>	Discussion
<b>P18</b>	C1	<i>This situations is mainly caused by the reality that the people habit is getting worse. It seems that the world is getting "smarter" but the attitde is getting worse. The littering habits is just a habit that people continue to do. As a teachers I can see that younger students try to learn to do some good deeds, that is not to do littering. However, when the come to the real situation, they cannot do it because the world is not using it. Hence everybody just does what is happening in their world now.</i>	Description

### Teachers' writing proficiency

In the writing test part, some issues were identified among the teachers. Both sections in the writing test focused on measuring teachers' genre knowledge through their writing products. Some excerpt samples from the teachers' writing products can be seen in Table 5. No changes are made to the excerpt samples in terms of spelling and grammatical structure. In other words, they are taken originally from the teachers' writing



products. The original transcripts are to maintain the authenticity of writing products to support the findings and discussions. The only change made is to the length of the transcript to give a more effective and efficient analysis. The selected excerpts in Table 5 represent each CEFR level result.

The excerpts show that the teachers did their best to express their ideas in such a way as to align with the text types of Description and Discussion. Both texts have different genres; generally, all teachers understood each type's social functions.

The A2 level teachers could only finish writing for 200 to 300 characters. However, regarding the generic structure of the texts, the A2 level teachers could not use the proper aspects of the genre. It shows that the teacher was unable to weave the ideas into writing. From the excerpts, teachers' ideas are still mixed up, overlapping, and disorganized.

According to the Council of Europe (2020), an A2 language user can write a series of basic phrases and sentences that are connected to simple conjunctions such as “and,” “but,” and “because.” Both teachers understood and could use the conjunctions. However, when it comes to teaching different text types, they should have adequate genre pedagogy understanding and knowledge. Especially when teaching primary-level students, teachers should have the quality to support the learning process and outcomes.

The learning phase A in *Kurikulum Merdeka* suggests that writing activities are not the focus yet. However, teachers should be able to use language that can help them explain how visuals or pictures can aid in practicing students' soft-motoric skills such as tracing and copying. Phase B informs that teachers assist students in producing simple description and procedure texts through visuals. If teachers do not have the expected language proficiency in demonstrating to students how the texts are composed through visuals, it will be tough for teachers to help students to be fluent in English to promote their acquisition of English as a foreign language (Enever & Moon, 2009; Juhana, 2014; Tomlinson, 2015).

Meanwhile, the B1 and B2 level teachers still showed inconsistencies regarding diction, ungrammatical sentences, and misspellings. Even though the teacher could give and justify the opinion based on the Can-Do statement in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020), they could not provide a systematic descriptive text structure. In addition, the teachers at the B2 level were still unable to provide comprehensive descriptions of real or imagined events and experiences, indicate the relationship between ideas in a text that was clear and connected, and follow the established conventions of the genre that was being discussed.

Both teachers still need to practice establishing logical relations between sentences (Rose, 2019). This is aligned with what phase C in *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires teachers to be able to do. PELTs are required to help students communicate their ideas and experiences through written texts and demonstrate students' understanding of the process of writing. This language skill should be a great focus for teachers as it determines the success of students in treating texts as social functions that make meanings. In addition, language proficiency will always be regarded as the foundation of teachers' professional confidence, particularly when they are non-native teachers from foreign countries (Richards et al., 2013).

According to Shulman (1987) and Jang et al. (2009), teachers' ability in language representations to deliver materials is crucial to create an effective language class environment. Furthermore, if teachers' language proficiency is high, it can help them incorporate good teaching strategies that will give their learning process many advantages.

The C1 level teacher was quite proficient in explaining complicated topics in a clear, well-structured way that brought out the most important points. This ability is in line with what a C1-level language user is suggested to master, according to the Council of Europe (2020). Even though there were some grammatical errors, the system of the register and the text's generic structure were appropriately used. The teacher could also incorporate more advanced vocabulary words properly into the text.

In the overall result of teachers' writing proficiency level, it can be concluded that the varied levels among them are still apparent and; thus, teachers' writing proficiency should be developed and improved. One successful way to develop teachers' writing proficiency is by developing their critical thinking toward genres. Teachers should engage students in the topic, which can help them develop critical thinking through mind mapping or brainstorming (Linguistic and Education Research Network, 1990). When teachers are proficient enough in using the target language in the brainstorming stage, it can also determine the success of the entire learning process. This will result in increasing students' genre knowledge.

#### *Teachers' speaking proficiency result*

Similarly, PELTs' speaking proficiency result is mixed. All speaking test sections focused on teachers' monologue skills. The questions ranged from introducing themselves, sharing memorable experiences, describing future contributions to the global warming campaign, sharing their opinions on technology development, and describing the future in general. Generally, the proficiency lies at Level B1/B2 or Independent Users for 15 teachers.

The speaking test still shows inconsistency in relation to grammatical structure. For instance, in introducing themselves, some teachers still said, "*I'm graduated from ...*", "*I was graduate from ...*" or "*I graduation at ...*" If the teachers have sufficient oral proficiency, it can allow them to deliver materials more smoothly and improve their English language command to fulfill the pedagogical responsibilities and offer adequate linguistic support to the students (Renandya et al., 2018). Furthermore, language proficiency has a great benefit in terms of addressing students' characteristics and needs. As informed earlier, *Kurikulum Merdeka* binds teachers to use a Genre-based Approach (GBA), thus in teaching different text types to students, teachers should use proper language features in deconstructing the texts and explaining significant features in both texts. In other words, when teachers try to connect students' prior knowledge to the present text types, it will be much easier if teachers can use relevant linguistic features.

The same condition also applies to addressing students' different language levels. The low level of proficiency among PELTs will prevent them from adjusting the language used in class. Communicating with low-achieving students is definitely different from communicating with high-achieving ones. Therefore, PELTs must need a good

level of language proficiency in teaching. Additionally, teachers must have a solid command of English communication skills (Kultsum, 2017).

Nonetheless, according to the descriptors in the Council of Europe (2020), the teachers could express themselves in oral production by providing a simple description or presentation in various contexts (A2). They, however, still need to develop more in sustaining a direct description of a variety of familiar subjects (B1), providing clear ideas with relevant supporting details (B2), and providing thorough descriptions of more complicated matters (C1). In *Kurikulum Merdeka* phase A, speaking skills focus more on oral language development. Teachers will demonstrate simple instructions using visuals and gestures and help students comprehend the main ideas from some information uttered orally with prompts. This is evident that teachers' oral proficiency in giving simple and effective instructions is crucial.

Acquiring the ability to speak a foreign language, such as English, is a process that involves very complicated language learning processes. For primary-level students, the process of beginning to learn a foreign language is quite similar to the process of beginning to study their own mother tongue. They need to have some additional time allotted to them in the classroom to listen to a foreign language, to be demonstrated by someone who has more proficient skills (in this case, their teachers), and they should also have more opportunities to repeat some of the phrases that they hear.

Phase B in *Kurikulum Merdeka* expects teachers to start assisting students in using alternatives in their sentences to partake in classroom routines, such as expressing feelings and asking for help. PELTs at the A2 level will struggle as they still have apparent mispronunciation. Even though teachers are not expected to have a native-like pronunciation, it will be much more significant if teachers are able to have acceptable pronunciation. Teachers' effort to use English in their contact with students is an excellent approach to provoke learners' speaking ability. Yet, qualified language teachers are essential to provide students with a solid foundation in English skills, such as pronunciation (Cahyati, 2018). Shulman (1987) echoed the importance of using proper language to maintain an interactive atmosphere in the classroom. When students regard their teachers as fluent and proficient in using the language, they can maintain trust in the teachers and the success of the learning process will be achieved. If teachers are not proficient in using English as a language for instruction and conduct ELT practice, the problem of having low-proficient high school leavers will recur (Apriliana, 2018; Chodidjah, 2007; Damayanti, 2019; Meisani et al., 2020; Ramdayanti, 2022; Suharno, 2017).

In phase C, teachers are required to help students develop more extensive interactions in social and classroom contexts. Therefore, teachers' good oral command can give a vivid sense of students' language development and boost their confidence in using a foreign language. Highly proficient teachers are better equipped to provide richer language input and utilize the resources available in the target language to promote their students' learning (Richards et al., 2013). Another necessary thing to consider and pay more attention to is teachers' pronunciation skills. From the speaking test, it was found that some teachers still encountered issues with unclear pronunciation. Students need to get correct pronunciation from their teachers. Phase C in the curriculum incorporates English sounds to have students identify various kinds of English pronunciation. In

addition, the knowledge of understanding phonetic symbols would be a great idea for teachers to master so that they can deliver acceptable pronunciation to students.

Even though Renandya, Hamied, and Nurkamto (2018) emphasize that proficiency is not the ultimate goal to support language learning in Indonesia, it will still determine the initial condition for teachers to conduct the class successfully and effectively. As echoed by Renandya, Hamied, and Nurkamto (2018), language education policymakers in Indonesia should have no persuasive case that can be made to scrap everything and start over. Some countries, such as Malaysia and Vietnam, have established national language proficiency standards. We can learn and adapt from the existing models. The adaptation may assist our country in preventing mistakes when constructing the standard for PELTs' language proficiency (Renandya et al., 2018). From the elaboration of the study results, the mixed level of proficiency among PELTs still exists. According to Musthafa (2010), despite the easy access to published research articles on TEYL in Indonesia, very few studies discuss the fact that primary-level English teachers in Indonesia do not have sufficient access to developing their language proficiency in the corridor of pedagogy topics.

## **Conclusions**

The study has shown that the proficiency level of primary English teachers' productive skills is still mixed. In both skills, most teachers are categorized into the B1/B2 level of CEFR or Independent Users of English. However, it should be noted that the majority level is in the minimum level required for students. Teachers, on the other hand, should achieve a higher level of language proficiency. The findings from this investigation should not be taken to depict the level of English proficiency possessed by PELTs in Bandung in terms of the level of their productive skills; however, the results do indicate that PELTs in Bandung must continue improving their level of English proficiency and become more involved in various teacher training programs in order to ensure that the teaching and learning process is a success. If teachers lack sufficient English proficiency, they will lack the self-assurance to use English for instructional purposes, they will be unable to perform in such areas as language skills integration, and it will be difficult for them to engage in student-centered learning, which requires active interactions between students and teachers that are conducted in English (Suharno, 2017; Meisani et al., 2020; Sikki et al., 2013; Chodidjah, 2007). By looking at the study results, it can be suggested that PELTs should be encouraged to participate in seminars or workshops intended to develop their language proficiency. Furthermore, teachers who are involved in the local Subject Teacher Learning Community (MGMP) of English to revamp, reassess, relook, and improve the standards of PELTs' language proficiency. Ensuring teachers' language proficiency level is higher than students' is everybody's responsibility. One of the ways to realize the standard of PELTs' language proficiency is by constructing and developing a standardized proficiency test. The standardized proficiency test should employ and reflect the learning phases stated in the national curriculum. The test construct can help the government map in-service and pre-service PELTs to develop narrowed training for teachers to develop some aspects they still lack. Furthermore, more extensive studies have to be made to identify teachers' proficiency levels regarding the six skills mandated in the curriculum. More

teacher involvement is also needed to gain more comprehensive and thorough data regarding primary English teachers' proficiency levels.

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