

Teaching Efficiency of Tutors and Language Proficiency of Korean Students: Basis for an In-Service Program

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Abstract

This study investigated the teaching efficiency of tutors and the English language proficiency of Korean students at Oceanic Kingdom English Academy in Bacolod City during September to November 2009. Using descriptive research design, it examined the relationship between tutor profiles (sex, age, length of service) and their teaching efficiency, as well as Korean student profiles (sex, age, length of study) and their proficiency in listening and reading. Instruments included a self-made student evaluation tool and the standardized TOEIC test. Results showed that

tutor teaching efficiency was generally rated "Very Good" to "Excellent," with longer teaching experience contributing positively. Korean students were more proficient in listening than reading, with male students outperforming females in listening. Significant differences were found based on select demographic factors, but no significant relationship existed between tutor efficiency and student language proficiency. Recommendations were made for targeted enhancement programs to improve both teaching and student outcomes.

Keywords: *teaching efficiency, language proficiency, TOEIC, Korean students, ESL, tutor evaluation, listening skills, reading proficiency, descriptive research.*

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of second or foreign languages had long been a central concern of linguists and educators. According to Whinney (1999), learners of a second language passed through developmental stages similar to those experienced by children acquiring their first language. Many linguists believed that early childhood represented a critical period for language acquisition, beyond which the brain's capacity to assimilate new languages significantly declined. Traditional language learning relied heavily on grammatical instruction and vocabulary memorization, while newer cognitive approaches emphasized immersion, spontaneous communication, and contextual learning.

Understanding how individuals learned a second language was essential to formulating effective pedagogy. Gardner (1999) emphasized the importance of aligning instructional strategies with learners' multiple intelligences. Meanwhile, the International Teacher Training Organization (2007) underscored that learning, although often socially situated, remained highly individualized. Learners differed in styles, preferences, and needs. Language proficiency, as defined by Lee (2009), encompassed oral and written

communication and included both academic and non-academic usage. Theories on proficiency informed standardized assessments such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), which evaluated listening and reading competencies.

Park (2003) pointed out that English and Korean differed greatly in syntax, phonetics, and sociolinguistics, presenting challenges for Korean students. These structural differences necessitated instructional adjustments and culturally responsive teaching. Williams (2007) highlighted the need for educators to bridge theory and practice, incorporating reflection and continuous improvement into their methodologies. As noted by Southall (2009), effective instruction demanded not only skill but also efficiency—characterized by strategic lesson planning, classroom management, and responsiveness to learner needs. Given these complexities, the role of the ESL/EFL tutor became increasingly significant in language learning environments.

Oceanic Kingdom English Academy, located at Lopues South Square, Bacolod City, had been catering primarily to South Korean students for nearly six years. With annual increases in student enrollment came the need for additional ESL/EFL tutors, many of whom lacked formal training in education. While some teacher development efforts had been implemented, teaching efficiency had not been a focused area for institutional enhancement. This gap highlighted the need to investigate the factors affecting tutor performance and their possible relationship with student language proficiency. Thus, the study aimed to provide an evidence-based foundation for a proposed in-service training program.

The researcher, who served as both an EFL tutor and area head at the academy, observed persistent issues in student performance and occasional feedback about tutor effectiveness. These prompted a deeper investigation into teaching efficiency and the language proficiency of Korean students. Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of Vaughan (1996), Reis (2007), Tuttle (2009), and Mandla (2000), this study explored how tutor characteristics—such as sex, age, and length of service—related to teaching efficiency, and whether these factors correlated with Korean students' listening and reading performance based on their TOEIC scores. The findings of this study were intended to inform targeted interventions for both teacher development and student language acquisition.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the descriptive research design, which was deemed most appropriate for identifying the teaching efficiency of tutors and the language proficiency of Korean students at Oceanic Kingdom English Academy. As defined by Best (1999), descriptive research involved the description, recording, analysis, and interpretation of existing conditions. It also entailed comparing non-manipulative variables to determine the relationships and influences among them. This method was suitable for presenting factual accounts regarding the characteristics, performance levels, and associations between the study's primary variables.

The research was conducted at Oceanic Kingdom English Academy, located at L. Building, Lopues South Square, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental, Philippines. The academy typically housed 70 to 100 South Korean students and employed approximately 50 to 70 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) tutors. The study involved 63 EFL tutors and 101 South Korean students officially enrolled during the months of September, October, and November 2009. The tutors were grouped according to sex, age, and length of service, while the Korean students were classified by sex, age, and length of study.

Two research instruments were employed to collect data: the Student Evaluation of Tutors Form and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). The Student Evaluation of Tutors Form was developed collaboratively by the school administrators and area heads and was validated using the evaluation criteria by Good and Scates (as cited in Ardales, 2008). It was further reviewed by five college professors. The computed mean of 4.16 indicated that the instrument was valid. The TOEIC questionnaire, a standardized instrument developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey, was used to measure the listening and reading proficiency of the Korean students. The TOEIC test consisted of 100 items for listening and 100 items for reading.

To ensure reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was applied to the Student Evaluation of Tutors Form. Thirty Korean students participated in a dry run of the instrument on September 1, 2009. The resulting Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.936, indicating a highly reliable instrument. As Allen (2002) stated, Cronbach's Alpha measures the internal consistency of a test by analyzing the variance among item scores and the total score, providing a reliable estimate of true versus error variance.

The data collected were processed with the assistance of a statistician and analyzed using various statistical tools. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the profile variables. To measure the level of teaching efficiency and language proficiency, the mean was computed. The t-test was employed to determine significant differences between groups based on sex, age, and length of service or study. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between teaching efficiency and language proficiency. The .05 level of significance was used as the benchmark to determine statistical significance, following the standard set by StatSoft (2008).

RESULTS

The study revealed that out of the 63 EFL tutors at Oceanic Kingdom English Academy, 76.19% were female and 23.81% were male. In terms of age, 84.13% were below the mean age of 30.93, categorizing them as younger tutors, while 15.87% were older. Regarding length of service, 71.43% of the tutors had served for less than 2.54 years, indicating a predominance of relatively new instructors in the academy. These profiles provided context for interpreting the variations in teaching efficiency across demographic categories.

When grouped by sex, both male and female tutors exhibited a "Very Good" level of teaching efficiency. Similarly, tutors of both age groups—older and younger—achieved a "Very Good" rating. However, when grouped according to length of service, those with longer experience were rated "Excellent," while their shorter-tenured counterparts were rated "Very Good." These findings indicated that teaching efficiency generally increased with experience. While sex and age showed limited impact, longer service appeared to significantly influence tutors' performance.

Statistical analysis using the t-test showed no significant difference in teaching efficiency between male and female tutors. However, a significant difference was found between younger and older tutors, as well as between those with shorter and longer lengths of service. These results suggested that age and tenure influenced teaching efficiency, while gender did not. This aligned with Campbell's (2001) assertion that teacher quality matters more than gender in determining instructional impact.

As for the Korean students, 54.46% were male and 45.54% were female. The majority (62.38%) were under the mean age of 24.39 years, and 71.29% had been enrolled for more than 2.15 months. In the listening component of TOEIC, male students were classified as "Proficient," while female students were

“Less Proficient.” Both younger and older students were “Proficient” in listening, as were those with shorter lengths of study. In contrast, all student groupings—regardless of sex, age, or study duration—were found to be “Less Proficient” in reading.

Significant differences in listening proficiency were noted between male and female students, favoring males. However, age and length of study did not result in significant differences. Similarly, in reading proficiency, there was a significant difference between the sexes, but none between age groups or study duration. Pearson's correlation revealed no significant relationship between tutors' teaching efficiency and students' proficiency in both listening and reading. This supported the finding that teaching efficiency did not directly predict student language outcomes, reinforcing the idea that a teacher can be efficient without being entirely effective in terms of student performance outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study highlighted the dominance of female tutors in Oceanic Kingdom English Academy, consistent with the general trend observed by the institution that more females applied and were qualified for ESL teaching roles. Despite this gender imbalance, there was no significant difference in teaching efficiency between male and female tutors, reinforcing the assertion by Campbell (2001) that it is the quality of teaching—not the teacher's sex—that significantly affects instructional outcomes. This indicated that both male and female tutors, regardless of gender-based perceptions, were equally capable of delivering quality instruction.

Age and length of service, however, were found to significantly influence teaching efficiency. Younger tutors showed slightly lower performance compared to their older counterparts, but those with longer service scored higher in teaching efficiency. This supported the idea that accumulated experience leads to improved familiarity with materials, classroom management, and instructional techniques. As suggested by Mandla (2000), teaching involves organizing learning efficiently and effectively, and this becomes more refined with time and professional exposure. The increased rating of tutors with longer service affirmed this observation.

In terms of language proficiency, male Korean students outperformed females in listening skills, which was a surprising finding considering that previous literature generally downplayed sex as a determinant of language performance. The proficiency of Korean students in listening, regardless of age or study length, confirmed the idea presented by Chapman (2008) that TOEIC listening materials provide practical, real-life contexts that can aid in comprehension. On the contrary, all Korean students were less proficient in reading regardless of sex, age, or study duration, indicating that reading remained a common area of difficulty. This was consistent with earlier findings by Gabilagon (2007), who noted reading and writing as weak skills among Korean learners.

The lack of a significant relationship between tutors' teaching efficiency and Korean students' language proficiency, both in listening and reading, was a critical insight. Although efficient tutors were observed, their efficiency did not necessarily translate to higher proficiency among students. This result confirmed the theoretical assertion by Southall (2009) that efficiency in lesson delivery does not always equate to effectiveness in student learning outcomes. It also echoed Tredyffrin/Easttown School District's (2009) observation that academic language acquisition typically requires more time, especially in reading, despite the presence of quality instruction.

These findings called attention to the need for more targeted interventions in reading instruction and for a nuanced understanding of what constitutes effective teaching in an EFL context. Although teaching efficiency was high, students still struggled with essential academic language skills. This gap pointed to the importance of continuous professional development for tutors, focused not only on efficiency but also on effectiveness. Moreover, it emphasized the need for language programs that address specific student weaknesses and reinforce long-term language acquisition goals.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the majority of EFL tutors at Oceanic Kingdom English Academy were young female teachers with relatively short teaching experience. Despite these demographic trends, both male and female tutors demonstrated a “Very Good” level of teaching efficiency. Notably, tutors with longer teaching experience were rated “Excellent,” indicating that professional maturity and exposure significantly enhanced instructional performance. Age and length of service were found to have a significant effect on teaching efficiency, affirming the view that effective instruction is a product of time, familiarity with classroom dynamics, and accumulated pedagogical skill.

For the Korean students, the data showed that males outperformed females in listening proficiency, while both sexes struggled in reading. The length of study and age did not significantly influence proficiency levels in either skill area. These results revealed that while Korean learners may become proficient listeners through short-term immersion, reading proficiency was more resistant to improvement and remained underdeveloped across groups. The findings aligned with Hakut’s (2000) assertion that rapid English language acquisition is unrealistic, especially for complex skills like academic reading.

A key finding of the study was the absence of a significant relationship between tutors’ teaching efficiency and the students’ language proficiency in both listening and reading. This underscored that efficient teaching alone was insufficient to ensure language acquisition, especially in an EFL context where learners face structural and cultural barriers in language use. The study supported Southall’s (2009) perspective that while teaching efficiency contributes to organized instruction, it must be paired with effective methodologies that target learners’ actual challenges to produce measurable improvements in proficiency.

In response to these findings, the study recommended the design and implementation of an in-service training program tailored to enhance the tutors’ teaching effectiveness. Although rated highly, areas of “Very Good” performance should still be targeted for improvement to raise them to “Excellent” levels. Younger and less experienced tutors may particularly benefit from mentoring programs led by senior educators. Such professional development initiatives would serve to strengthen instructional consistency and raise overall performance levels within the institution.

Finally, the study strongly recommended that programs focused on improving the reading skills of Korean students be prioritized. Given the persistent low performance in reading despite length of stay and immersion, time-tested strategies for reading comprehension and academic vocabulary building must be adopted. Additionally, future research could explore gender-based differences in listening and reading proficiency in greater depth, and examine other learner-related variables such as motivation, anxiety, and learning strategies that may influence English language development in EFL contexts.

Proposed In-Service Program

The proposed in-service program for tutors at Oceanic Kingdom English Academy (OKEA) is a comprehensive year-round initiative designed to enhance the teaching efficiency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) tutors. Grounded in findings from a research study, the program addresses various aspects of teaching, such as lesson preparation, classroom management, instructional delivery, and student evaluation. It acknowledges that effective teaching significantly influences student learning, and therefore, aims to systematically develop tutors' skills through targeted interventions and structured professional development.

The program is structured into monthly seminar-workshops, each focusing on a specific area identified as needing improvement. Each month consists of four one-hour sessions held every Friday, combining lectures, discussions, group work, demonstrations, and hands-on presentations. For instance, January focuses on preparing and designing effective teaching materials, while subsequent months tackle topics like implementing classroom policies (February), conducting remedial classes (March), and designing student-centered activities (May). This approach allows for in-depth exploration and mastery of each competency area over a manageable time frame.

Each monthly cycle concludes with a post-conference, reflection, and recollection session. This component serves a dual purpose: it offers a venue for feedback and evaluation from both trainers and participants, and it allows for the refinement or modification of the program based on actual teaching experiences. These feedback loops are crucial in ensuring the program remains responsive and adaptive to the evolving needs of tutors and students alike.

To support implementation, each training session involves both trainers and all OKEA tutors, with a uniform budget of ₱5,000 allocated per month. Evaluation of the program's effectiveness relies on random classroom observations conducted by area heads, along with monthly student evaluations of tutor performance. This ensures that the theoretical knowledge and strategies introduced during training are being applied effectively in real classroom settings.

In conclusion, the proposed in-service program is a well-structured and data-driven professional development plan. Its strength lies in its cyclical nature, clear objectives, practical application, and strong evaluative mechanisms. By addressing multiple facets of teaching efficiency in a systematic and participatory manner, the program holds great promise in enhancing the professional growth of EFL tutors at OKEA and, ultimately, improving student language outcomes.

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