

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST FOR ENGLISH PRE-SERVICE TEACHER IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

A review of the current literature on English language test proficiency elucidates that much of the existing work either: (i) focuses on the scores of the proficiency test for more students and very few teachers, (ii) finds the correlation between the students' proficiencies with their studies at the campus, (iii) identifies the desirable competencies test to be applied to the students without providing any objective reasons why they need to have those competencies for mastering the English language. This paper scrutinizes the research development of English language test proficiency used for students and teachers, especially the pre-service teachers in Indonesia. Systematically, the article explores two essential aspects: the research development of English language test proficiency and English language test proficiency for pre-service teachers, both aspects focused on Indonesian contexts.

Keywords: *English Proficiency Test, Pre-Service Teacher, Review Literature*

INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency is an indicator of someone's ability to speak a language. Quoted from Education.com, language proficiency measures how well an individual has mastered a language. Receptive and expressive language abilities, grammar, vocabulary, semantics, and other language-related skills are used to gauge proficiency. Language competency is also divided into four categories: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Each language determines an individual's linguistic competency; therefore, they may be fluent in English but not in another language.

English is regarded as the most significant language in the world. It is the primary language of communication used across borders. It makes it easier for people from many nations to connect and comprehend one another. English is also the universal language used in a wide range of areas for commerce, education, communication, and entertainment, as Crystal (2003) said. As a result, there is a growing need for people to study English as a second or foreign language. In addition, every nation, including Indonesia, has a high demand for speakers with good proficiency in English.

Many benefits can be taken from having good English proficiency. According to Anamaria-Mirabela & Monica-Ariana (2013), the benefits of having good English proficiency for students can be seen for four reasons: communicative ability, cognitive development, cultural awareness, and job opportunities. Regarding cognitive skills, good English proficiency helps improve memory, critical thinking, and study skills. As Pop (2011) said that if someone studies a

foreign language since kindergarten, it provides a better understanding of grammar, which later trains him or her to clearly express their thoughts and gives them strong vocabulary skills and a broader perspective on their thinking. A study from Bamford & Mizokawa (1991) also stated that students who learn a foreign language are better at solving complex problems than those who do not.

There is a plethora of research conducted by many researchers focusing on English proficiency. Some researchers researched to investigate the relationship between language proficiency and academic performance among different groups of international students in English-speaking institutions by utilizing standardized test scores such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) (Kerstijens & Nery, 2000; Krausz, A. Schiff, J. Schiff, & Hise, 2005; Woodrow, 2006; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015). Other research deals with acknowledging the students' English competence based on the taken majors and study programs (Ras, 2017) and analyzing the students' English proficiency from TOEIC scores to help the lectures provide relevant learning materials needed (Damayanti & Gafur, 2020).

From the explanations, many previous studies have examined the students' English proficiency, but very few have scrutinized the teachers' English proficiency, especially pre-service teachers. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: (1) How is the English proficiency test research developing in Indonesia?; (2) What is an English proficiency test for pre-service teachers?; (3) What is an ideal English proficiency Test for an English pre-service teacher in Indonesia?

English Proficiency Test for Teachers

Teaching a foreign language, especially English challenges English teachers. Ideally, they are expected to be like native speakers or have complete control over the English language used as a medium of instruction (Elder & Kim, 2013). The English language skills of English teachers are known to play a significant role when they explain the material, provide examples, select relevant teaching materials, model the correct use of language, and provide effective feedback on student performance (Renandya et al., 2018). Research from Van Canh & Renandya (2017) also states that English teachers' language proficiency significantly affects how language is used in the classroom to improve learning. In other words, their language proficiency skills are just as essential as their general skills.

Seeing the urgency in mastering English in teachers, many studies in several regions of the world have tried to examine the level of English proficiency of English teachers. One of the studies conducted by Cárdenas et al. (2013). This study describes the proficiency level of a group of English teachers who participated in a study on the conditions of implementing the bilingual program in Santiago de Cali. The data were analyzed using the Teacher Development Model from Richards & Roberts (2018) by conducting tests, group interviews, and surveys. The results show that teachers from the public and private sectors are still building their language proficiency levels. It is also found that the basic level teachers in the public sector still have weak language skills.

Subsequent research has also succeeded in highlighting the competence of teachers in India in using English as a teaching medium (Gul & Aziz, 2015). This study aimed to test speaking proficiency in English as a medium of instruction and to explore the causes of the lack of English for secondary school teachers. The study involved only level three teachers in Punjab, namely Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Mianwali. The research population consisted of 3,235 teachers. The double Sampling technique was used to select samples. One hundred and fifty teachers were selected as the sample who were interviewed using an interview guide to test teachers' linguistic competence. Two hundred teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire to obtain the data. The study's results found that teachers had poor skills in mastering grammar and vocabulary. However, on average, almost half of the respondents had fluency and felt confident when speaking in English. However, it can be concluded that the two studies presented have not provided comprehensive suggestions on solutions for how to improve low competence and the lack of mastery of grammar and vocabulary owned by teachers, especially novice teachers.

In Indonesia, Nugroho (2018) also researched the proficiency of English teachers at the junior and senior high school levels who joined Pendidikan dan Pelatihan Profesi Guru (PLPG) at the State University of Surabaya in 2017. The results showed that most participants stated they were very confident with their competence but also needed continuous self-development activities, specifically for their language skills. Various activities are proposed. Some of their proposals are to maintain the four micro-skills, provide scholarships for teachers to take short course programs abroad, and maximize the function of the subject teachers association (MGMP). Unlike before, Aniroh (2009) discussed the need for teachers in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to have good quality teaching, one of which is proficiency in English. However, he did not discuss the issue of skills in more detail.

Meanwhile, recent research by Lie et al. (2019) found the proficiency level of 149 junior high school teachers from five regions in Indonesia (Palembang, Yogyakarta-Sleman, Surabaya, Ruteng, and Maluku). Teachers are assessed using a test instrument from the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). The test is also based on interpersonal communication, presentational speaking, presentational writing, interpretive listening, and interpretive reading. The study results describe several facts, such as those senior teachers in Indonesia have lower language skills than junior teachers. In addition, this study also found that only committed teachers self-developed their language skills. Wulyani et al. (2019) also successfully investigated whether English teachers could maintain their language proficiency by looking at the relationship between language proficiency and tenure and teachers' perceptions of their ability to speak English. Using the mixed method, they conducted proficiency tests for teachers regarding vocabulary, writing, and reading, distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews to obtain data. The results show that the period of a person's work experience does not guarantee that someone will have good English proficiency test results. However, another fact is also found that teachers find it difficult to assess their language skills. Furthermore, Anugrahwati and Saukah's (2010) research argues that English language teachers are more likely to focus their knowledge on the subject matter. They assume that language proficiency is guaranteed to be mastered by teachers with bachelors or D-IV degree qualifications.

Several studies have discussed that there are many challenges for English teachers related to their level of proficiency. Therefore, the researchers assume that there is a need to observe English teachers on the English proficiency test they received while still a student or as a pre-service teachers. Moreover, to see how these skills influence their competence in other things, such as competence in doing assignments in class or on the Grade Point Average (GPA) they get.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN INDONESIA

A study by Vongpumivitch (2012) tried to analyze students' perceptions of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) developed by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan. This test aims to improve students' English skills, motivate English language learning, and encourage lifelong learning. The results of the 384 students tested using a questionnaire showed that only a tiny proportion answered that the GEPT successfully motivated them to learn English. Most test takers did not support the idea that GEPT was successful in promoting lifelong learning. However, they admitted that GEPT succeeded in making them feel that their English had improved. From this study, it can be concluded that the proficiency test also positively affects students' English competence. Then, what about the students of the English study program in particular? Unfortunately, no studies focus on the effect of these proficiency tests on them. Therefore, there is a need for a study that explores the effect of proficiency tests on English students regarding their English competence when they are still studying on campus or teaching as English teachers in the classroom.

Many experts have stated that teachers' English proficiency also plays a vital role in teaching and learning activities ((Renandya et al., 2018; Richards, 2015; Andrews, 2007). By adopting a conversation analysis study approach, Van Canh & Renandya (2017) have examined how teachers use the target language in the classroom and create learning opportunities for English language learners. They also explored the relationship between teachers' target language proficiency and how they use the target language in the classroom to engage students in learning. Results of the study concluded that English teachers' proficiency could significantly influence how they use language in the classroom to encourage learning. The teachers think their classroom language proficiency is as important as their general proficiency. Then, one characteristic that determines an effective English teacher is a teacher who is proficient in the language. Proficient in using the language creates a conducive learning environment and enhances student learning by engaging them in pedagogically meaningful interactions. Therefore, a balanced approach must address language proficiency issues in teacher education programs. This approach considers the need to improve not only the language skills of student teachers but also their ability to use the target language to create an optimal learning environment.

This statement also follows a study by Freeman (2017), which argues that the notion of English proficiency, in general, is often based on general statements about language use and does not discuss the type of classroom teachers need to teach. Therefore, he proposes a concept called English for Teaching, which is used by English teachers in language teaching in the classroom and is based on language methodology for a specific purpose. This concept defines three functional

areas of classroom language use: managing the classroom, understanding and communicating lesson content, and providing feedback to students. This article tries to analyze the concept and implementation of the programs provided by the ministry of education for teachers in Japan and Vietnam. The results show that participating in the programs offered by teachers in both countries positively affects their classroom language proficiency. In Japan, researchers have also identified improvements in general English proficiency. It increased from an average of 39.6 (out of 100) before the program to 49.9 at the end of the program.

By seeing the positive potential with the implementation of the proficiency test program, it can be assessed that it is necessary to hold a similar program for English teachers in Indonesia. Nevertheless, before that, it is better to do a comprehensive proficiency test by testing the four skills and the use of pedagogical language in the classroom for English teachers because of previous studies, especially in Indonesia. Since this has not examined the aspects of the pedagogical language used by teachers in class (Cardenas et al. (2013); Gul & Aziz, (2015); Nugroho (2018); Aniroh (2009); Anugrahwati & Saukah (2010); Lie et al. (2019); and Wulyani et al. (2019)). Moreover, some research that had done by looking at the number of test instruments that can be used to test teacher skills, as has been done by Lie et al. (2019) using a test from ACTFL, Vongpumivitch (2012), which tested with GEPT, Low and Ellis (2014) who used IELTS, Teacher Competency Assessment (TCA) tested by Kuntarto et al. (2019) or the TOEIC test used by Coleman (2009) in his research. Nevertheless, the researchers assume that this type of test is not optimal for comprehensively seeing teachers' competence level or prospective English in English. Knoch & Macqueen (2019) state that a good aptitude test is an aptitude test that lacks risk management, meaning that if a test is designed for a context, then the needs analysis must focus on that one context. If a test is carried out, but the existing tests do not capture the language code relevant to the topic and cannot provide information about performance in this domain, the test can be called an unfair test. Therefore, it takes a test following the existing problems.

For this purpose, the researchers proposed the English Proficiency Test (LPATE) prepared by the Hong Kong Ministry of Education. This test is proposed because it fits the needs of the research. LPATE is also under the concept of Language Assessment for Professional Purposes (LAPP), which is defined by Knoch & Macqueen (2019) as

..any assessment process carried out by and for invested parties, which is used to determine a person's ability to understand and/or use the language of a professionally-oriented domain to a specified or necessary level. (p. 3)

This statement means any assessment process carried out by and for the investee, which is used to determine a person's ability to understand and/or use professionally oriented domain language to the level specified or required. Then, this proficiency test has been structured around the idea of a 'code of relevance' (Knoch & Macqueen, 2019), a concept aimed at enabling aptitude test compilers to consider all possible language uses of a domain and then prioritize the code (or language, dialect), and registers) which will contribute most efficiently and communicatively in the workplace (in this case, in teaching and learning activities carried out by English teachers in the classroom). In the LPATE test, the authors have included the domain of teacher class language

proficiency. This explanation will distinguish this proficiency test from other proficiency tests that have been studied in the world, especially in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The current study unveils some crucial facts in exploring English students' and teachers' proficiency, especially for pre-service teachers. This study highlights that providing pre-service teachers with an appropriate English proficiency test will reveal their true proficiency that can help them in their teaching and learning activities in the classroom later. Such as by using the LPATE test in Hong Kong for assessing English teachers' proficiency. Sadly, in Indonesia, there is no such test available now. Therefore, the researchers proposed to conduct some research to analyze the correlation between the language proficiency test and student learning outcomes. Also, this research can try to see how far the correlation of the LPATE proficiency test results is with the syllabus used in the classroom. Because no existing research has tried to dig deeper into this, most of them look from the side of the GPA results obtained by students (Cho & Bridgeman, 2012) or at one of the language skills, such as reading (Kunnan & Carr (2017) or writing (Llosa & Malone, 2019). Thus, it will bring up a novelty in the theory of the formulation of the English curriculum proposed using the test results. The preparation or refinement of the curriculum based on detailed information on the English language skills of prospective teachers has never been used in research-previous research in Indonesia.

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