

Students' Perceptions Towards the Significance of The Preparation of English Proficiency Test

Depi Triana¹, Siti Asiyah² and Niken Reti Indriastuti³

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo
depitriana981@gmail.com

² Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo
asiyahsiti685@gmail.com

³ Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo
nikenreti@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In the increasing demand for English proficiency for educational and career purposes, the English proficiency test (TOEFL) is used to determine an individual's level of English proficiency. Getting the desired results of English proficiency test could be challenging; therefore, test preparation is available to assist test takers in preparing for the test. This study was, then, aimed at finding out (1) the role of test preparation strategies in improving students' abilities related to the English proficiency test (2) students' perceptions of the significance of the preparation for the English proficiency test program. This research was mixed-method convergent parallel design. This study used a questionnaire and an interview as the instruments to collect the data. The subject of the research was 11th grade students from the same bilingual class at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Ponorogo. The findings of the study show that the test preparation strategies—simulation, practice, and discussion—were well-accepted by students, and the program ran smoothly. The preparation program also received positive feedback from the students. Students are now more aware of the significance of the English proficiency test for their future education and career after enrolling in the preparation program. of the research. ritten in English; concise and factual and is able to stand alone as a unit of information.

KEYWORDS: *students' perception, preparation for the english proficiency test*

INTRODUCTION

In today's connected world, learning foreign languages, especially English, is a vital requirement in today's world (Harmanto, 2020). As an international language, mastering English is essential for every individual to participate in and benefit from the global economic system, as it provides access to education, skill sets, and job opportunities, as well as a facilitator of social mobility. As a language that has many virtues in an individual's life, there are requirements that must be applied as standards in order to guarantee an individual's English proficiency. An instrument that can be used to establish English proficiency standards is an English language test.

Language testing services provide a range of specialized language examinations since the capacity to communicate in English might have an impact on a person's future. In order to help provide an assessment of English proficiency, English proficiency tests are now available in

several different formats and types of tests, both standard and non-standard. For international purposes, the English language test has several standard variations that can be taken to meet specific requirements. According to Kasim et al., (2019) English language tests that are recognized as standardized test include the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Among those English standardized tests, The TOEFL test has been asserted to be the most widely used.

The scores an individual earns on a proficiency test certificate will indicate their level of proficiency in English. These are encouraging individuals to strive to pass the proficiency test with a good score. To get a high score, taking a class to prepare for the English proficiency test is one strategy to acquire the target score. Currently, there are many institutions that specifically offer preparation classes for English proficiency tests. In preparation for English proficiency test, individuals are expected to benefit from preparation program by learning the mechanics of taking tests, which will allow them to concentrate on and effectively display the abilities and skills being evaluated (Sudrajat & Astuti, 2018).

The preparation class is seen to be crucial in assisting with an individual's readiness to meet the requirements for taking the actual test. According to Akmal et al., (2020), preparing for the test can reduce test-taker anxiety while also potentially enhancing students' expertise and level of English proficiency. Therefore, besides helping learners with theory, preparation classes like these are thought to assist learners to stay motivated and focused on their main purposes.

As English is regarded as a challenging subject (Asiyah, 2018), assisting in English learning demands for the appropriate method and approach. The preparation class is intended to aid test takers in dealing with English proficiency tests, is supposed to be able to overcome the obstacles and challenges encountered by test takers, particularly in learning and understanding English.

Practically, practicing is one of the most effective strategies for learning languages. The finding by Mostafa (2022) shows that the integrative practice- based approach is quite successful in helping students gain language proficiency. In preparation for an English proficiency test, practicing can help students experience simulations that may influence their scores on the actual test.

With the introduction and direct practicing experience during the preparation program, the researcher aims to investigate the high school students' perceptions towards the preparation of the English proficiency test. Students' perceptions of learning processes may actually be more relevant than what outsiders observe because student perspectives are influenced by their own learning behaviors and the insights they experience. This study will be conducted at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Ponorogo in the preparation of the English proficiency test service.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of learning a new language, applying the appropriate strategies will aid in the achievement of language learning. Especially for the preparation of the English proficiency test, it is necessary to employ particular strategies in order to maximize the learning outcomes. Following are the strategies in test preparation:

2.1 Simulation

In the context of education, simulations are the scenarios in which students participate in a pretend situation that was designed by the teacher. According to Musnandar (2020), simulation is an experiential learning strategy in which students are taught to comprehend and participate in specific situational experiences through role-playing. Since it provides direct experience of a situation, simulation is regarded as a suitable strategy for learning for specific purposes. In the test

preparation, simulation strategies are often used to provide direct experience to test-takers. When teaching test preparation, the fundamental objective is to get test takers ready to take on test situations and perform better. Therefore, providing simulations can help students recognize and comprehend the types of material they will encounter on the actual test.

2.2 Discussion

A discussion-based learning strategy involves students actively participating in a topic's discussion. It is a form of learning activity where students engage in discussion among themselves to exchange ideas and opinions while being guided or assisted by a teacher. The discussion strategy would assist learners in critically grasping the material, developing self-awareness and the ability to self-criticise, appreciating diversity, and taking informed action. According to Sipayung (2019), the major objectives of the discussion technique are to solve problems, provide answers to questions, contribute to and comprehend students' existing knowledge, and reach decisions. Therefore, using this method for test preparation is thought to be the best option.

2.3 Practice

Practice is a strategy that can expose students to a direct confrontation with a problem. This provides an opportunity for students to interact with and explore the materials. According to Aladejana & Fatoba (2022), practice strategy is based on the concepts of active learning methods or instruction, that have been employed indirectly by teachers and learners and was found to be highly effective in teaching and learning. Practice approach, according to Nurlianti et al., (2019), is ideal for learning math, foreign languages, and enhancing individual's vocabulary. Practice is basically a learning method that strives to offer a more specific instructional experience by providing exercise questions meant to evaluate students' performance skills by the pace with which they complete the practice questions given (Pujawan, 2018). By practicing, test takers will become acquainted with and fully comprehend the concept by directly experiencing the simulation and having the opportunity to evaluate its shortcomings.

Dwinaya et al.'s (2022) study, which aims to introduce proficiency tests to high school students so that they are aware of and familiar with the variety of its questions, has successfully achieved its goals by improving high school students' understanding of TOEFL and their capacity to take the TOEFL tests. The survey by Damanik & Ginting (2022) an improvement in the students' comprehension and familiarity with the TOEFL test. This is evident from the high percentage rate of knowledge and comprehension achieved by students after receiving the TOEFL materials. Practically speaking, practice is one of the best methods for acquiring a language. The finding by Mostafa (2022) shows that the integrative practice-based approach is quite successful in helping students gain language proficiency. In preparation for an English proficiency test, practicing can help students experience simulations that may influence their scores on the actual test.

Related studies discuss that the TOEFL is a popular method for assessing English language proficiency. High school students are frequently introduced to the TOEFL to help them comprehend its significance for their future academic and professional endeavors. Some high school teachers and community service organizations provide TOEFL preparation for students with the aim of introducing the test, solving questions, and sharing strategies for getting a high TOEFL score. Additionally, according to previous studies and student perceptions, practicing is one of the most significant strategies in preparation classes.

METHODOLOGY

The population of this study was the 11 th grade bilingual students at SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Ponorogo with a bilingual class of 11 IPS 1, 11 IPA 2, and 11 IPA 3 as a sample. This study uses a mixed-method convergent parallel design. According to Creswell (2017:294), the research procedure of mixed-method convergent parallel design as follow:

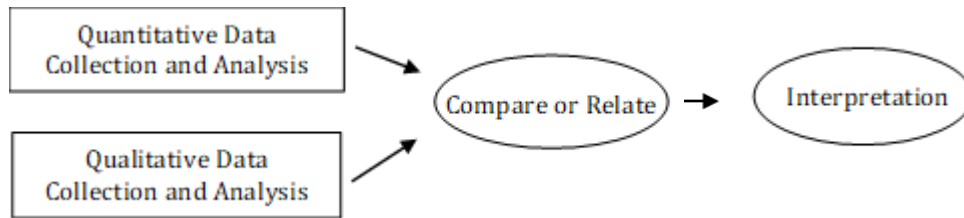


Figure 1. Mixed-method convergent parallel design

Using both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) to gather the data. A total of 76 students has response to the questionnaires on August 12, 2022 after students enrolled in preparation program and completed the post-test from August 8 to August 12, 2022. The interview was conducted on January 9, 2023, 36 with each student representative from the three bilingual classes of 11 IPS 1, 11 IPA 2, and 11 IPA 3. With a total of six students, the interview was conducted one-by-one with them. To strengthen the data, researchers also conducted interviews with teachers to be used as data triangulation.

To meet the study's goals, the acquired data must be examined using methodologies relevant to the research design. Since the research design of this study was mixed-method, the data was analyzed in a quantitative and qualitative way. In analyzing the quantitative data, the researcher used percentages to describe the results of the students' questionnaire. A percentage is a quantity or ratio that is represented as a fraction of 100. It is frequently indicated by the percent sign, "%." The following formula was used to analyze the questionnaire data and generate a percentage:

$$x = \frac{\text{Value}}{\text{Total value}} \times 100$$

While in qualitative data analysis, the steps include organizing, analyzing, and interpreting non-numerical data into information to provide a result and conclusion. According to Miles & A. Huberman (1994:10) there are three phases of qualitative data analysis: data reduction; data display; conclusion drawing verification.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaire have shown that the program has served students well in preparation for the English proficiency test with the following questionnaire figure result:

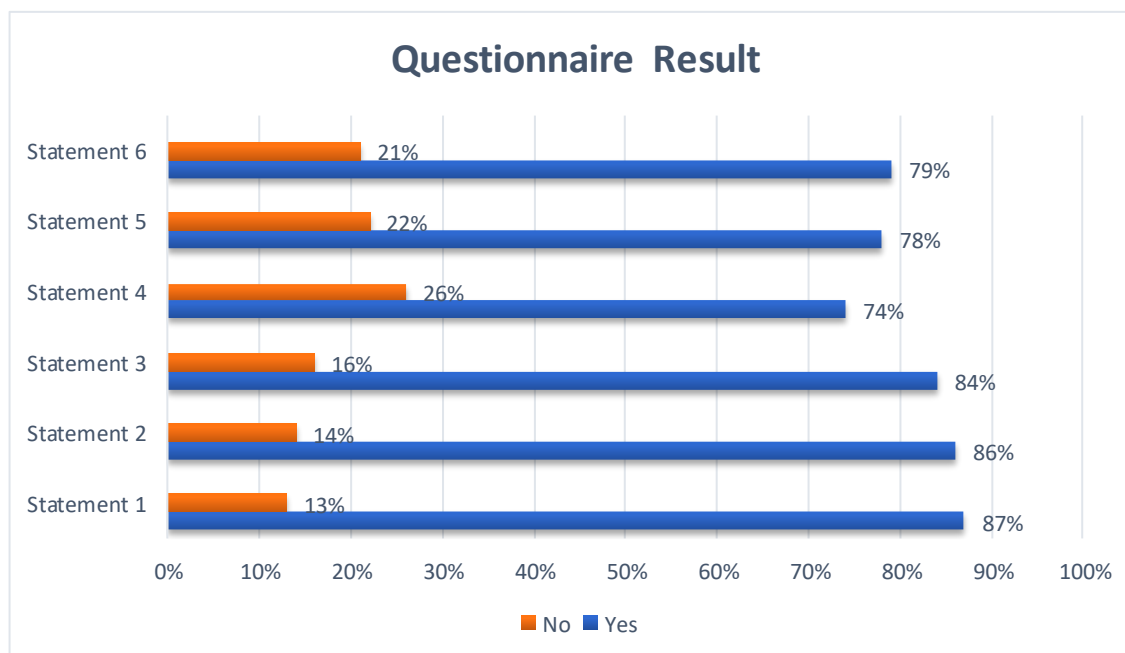


Figure 2. Student responses to the questionnaire

The first statement demonstrates how challenging the pre-test was for the majority of students. 87% of the respondents who participated in the preparation program indicated that they were incapable of or had difficulty completing the pre-test before the preparation program.

The second statement indicated that the majority of students significantly benefited from the preparation program by understanding the questions they found difficulty in the pre-test. This is shown by the 86% of respondents who agreed that the English test preparation class had improved their understanding of the test's questions.

In the third statement, the majority of the students confirmed their enjoyment of the fun lesson and their satisfaction at the opportunity to improve their English language abilities. According to 84% of total respondents, the program offers a range of enjoyable and well-received test preparation activities.

Besides the learning strategies that were well received, in the fourth statement, students admit that this program triggered their curiosity regarding the questions in the test. The program raises the curiosity of 74% of students, which could result in an increase in their English abilities.

In contrast to the pre-test, where students felt less capable, as many as 78% of respondents concurred that they performed better on the post-test after joining the preparation program for the English proficiency test. The fifth statement reveals that this program was effective in enhancing their English abilities. The success of the preparation class in improving students' English abilities is also supported by the results of the questionnaire in the sixth statement, where as many as 79% of respondents thought that this class did help them improve their English skills, especially in facing the English proficiency test.

According to the results of the questionnaire, the relevance of this preparation program was

positive. The preparation program has aided students in recognizing, comprehending, and improving their English skills, particularly in preparing for the English proficiency test. The results of this study also show how the strategies used—simulation, practice, and discussion—were able to enhance students' English abilities in a fun and well-accepted way by the students.

All of the students who participated in the interview agreed that the preparation program helped them comprehend the English proficiency test as a necessary test in the future that would benefit them. The preparation program helps students recognize and sharpen their knowledge of the English proficiency test. It can be difficult for students to pass an English proficiency test with its complex question styles. By using strategies such as simulation, practice, and discussion, the preparation program enables students to solve challenging questions. The strategies in this program were effective to improve students' language learning process, which is proven by their better performance in completing the post-test than the pre-test.

Teachers also have the same perception. According to the data, teachers believe that program preparation is necessary to introduce students to English proficiency tests. This program will be beneficial for the future of students, especially in this Generation Z era where English proficiency tests have become a requirement for educational and professional purposes. The teacher also believes that to be able to participate in an international context, mastering English is the key. Therefore, the preparation program is considered necessary to help students comprehend the significance of the English proficiency test and recognize the types of questions in it, which both will make them more aware in the future.

All of the data analyzed indicates that students have a favorable perception of this program. This program is considered to help students recognize the English proficiency test, in line with Damanik & Ginting (2022) findings that the preparation class has improved the students' comprehension and familiarity with the TOEFL test. The preparation program was also improved students' ability to complete the test with effective and well-accepted learning strategies. This program has increased student awareness about the importance of the English proficiency test for their future. In addition to enhancing their test-taking skills, students claimed that this program helped them increase their English language abilities.

The findings, which were supported by data triangulation, demonstrated that test preparation strategies—simulation, practice and discussion—are a good strategy to prepare for the English proficiency test. This finding is in line with Sutanti & Salma (2022) findings regarding the effectiveness of learning and practice strategies used in TOEFL preparation in enhancing test results.

CONCLUSION

According to the students' perception, not all of the students were aware of the English proficiency test prior to this program. By enrolling in the preparation program, students could recognize what the English proficiency test is and its significance. All students agreed that the program was well-accepted and could improve their comprehension on the English proficiency test. All students also stated that a program like this would also influence their future for educational and professional purposes by increasing their awareness of general knowledge and their understanding of the types of content contained in the English proficiency test. They felt that a program like this made them more conscious of its relevance for their future.

The preparation program that employed the strategies of simulation, practice, and discussion got a positive response from the students. The majority of students clarified that the preparation program ran effectively and was well-accepted. By implementing test preparation strategies, the program prepares students to face the challenging test questions. Even the small percentage of students who claim the program didn't run effectively since they were less capable of understanding the lesson clarified that the program did improve their ability to complete the

post-test. These demonstrate that strategies used in the preparation program have improved students' abilities on the English proficiency test.

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