

Developing an English Proficiency Test for Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Universities worldwide have recognized the significance of assessing students' language abilities to ensure they can actively participate in academic discourse. However, many universities do not have institution-based English proficiency test yet. The aim of the research is to explore the significances of developing university-based English proficiency test, the essential steps involved in crafting it, and challenges in developing a robust institution's English proficiency test. The method used in this research is library research. The results underscore the critical role of an English proficiency test in ensuring academic excellence, promoting global communication, and preparing students for success in an increasingly interconnected world. Developing a well-structured and reliable English proficiency assessment tool starts with a decision to provide a test, developing the test, and followed by those stages connected with test use. Nevertheless, defining test objective and ensuring test validity, choosing the right format, ensuring fairness and inclusivity, preparing substantial cost and resources, adapting for specific contexts are challenges in developing it. In sum, universities can develop a robust English proficiency test by having collaboration with language experts, assessment specialists, and educators, as well as adherence to established principles of language testing and assessment .

Key words: Developing; English Proficiency Test

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has evolved as an essential skill in today's globalized society, particularly in the academic sphere. Universities around the world have acknowledged the importance of assessment students' language ability in order to ensure that they can fully participate in academic discourse. Therefore, Scholars have emphasized the importance of designing an English competency test for universities. According to Knoch, U. (2016), with the increasing globalization and internationalization of education, a common language competency baseline is essential to promote successful communication and learning among students from varied countries and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, by developing an English proficiency test, it can help identify students who may require additional language support (Hamp-Lyons, L., & Kroll, B, 1996), as well as ensure that all students have

the necessary language skills to comprehend course materials, engage in academic discussions, and produce high-quality academic work (Cumming, A., & Elder, C., 2004).

Furthermore, English proficiency tests are linked to employability and professional achievement, standardization, and recognition According to Ede, L. (2001), English language skills are highly prized by employers in today's global job market, hence researchers advocate for English proficiency examinations to equip students with the language abilities required for worldwide employment prospects and professional achievement. Furthermore, implementing a standardized English proficiency test connects colleges with global academic standards and facilitates recognition and accreditation by foreign educational institutions and organizations (Davies, A. (1990).

To summarize, these arguments highlight the need of an English proficiency test in assuring academic achievement, encouraging global communication, and preparing students for success in an increasingly interconnected world. Developing a well-structured and dependable evaluation tool is critical for institutions to achieve academic goals while also meeting the different demands of their student population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several scientists in the disciplines of language assessment and applied linguistics have defined and documented language competency assessments. Language proficiency tests, according to Brown, H. D., and Abeywickrama, P. (2010), are instruments used to assess a language user's ability to accomplish activities in a target language under controlled conditions. Furthermore, Shohamy, E. (2001), states that language proficiency examinations are developed to assess candidates' language competency for specific communicative tasks. Similarly, Green, A. (2014) describes English proficiency exams as assessments of a candidate's ability to use English in academic, professional, or social settings. These definitions stress the aim and scope of English proficiency tests, which focus on measuring an individual's language competency, typically within specific situations or tasks. They can be used to assess language learners' proficiency and ensure that they have the necessary language skills for various kinds of academic, professional, and social goals.

METHOD

Design and Samples

The research method used in this research was a literature study that contains theories that are relevant to the problems in the research.

Instrument and Procedure

The data collection technique used was a literature study with relevant data collection.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using inductive and deductive qualitative analysis techniques.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Divergent Perspectives on the Design and Development of English Proficiency Tests: A Scholarly Analysis

The design and development of English proficiency exams has prompted a wide range of opinions among academics, owing to differing philosophies, research approaches, and educational environments.

Views on the Purpose and Objectives of the Test

Some scholars emphasize the importance of English proficiency tests as a useful means of assessing language learners' proficiency and ensuring that learners have the necessary language skills for a variety of academic, professional, and social objectives (Knoch, U, 2016; Hamp-Lyons, L., & Kroll, B, 1996; Cumming, A., & Elder, C., 2004; Ede, L., 2001; Davies, A., 1990). On the contrary, Alderson (2005) offers a critical perspective on the possible limitations of language assessments, which may fail to represent the various language abilities and requirements of individual students. He calls for a more contextualized approach to language assessment that takes into account the distinctive linguistic demands of various academic disciplines.

Views on Test Format and Content

Scholars' opinions on exam forms and content validity may differ. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) advocate for adopting appropriate test forms that examine essential language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking to achieve thorough language evaluation. On the other hand, some researchers are concerned about cultural bias in test content and scoring. McNamara (2000) raises questions about the fairness of English proficiency assessments for test takers from various cultural origins.

Views on Test Validity and Reliability

Another source of debate among academics is test validity and reliability. Hughes (2003) emphasizes the need of creating clear scoring rules and rater training to achieve consistency and dependability in scoring. Other academics, however, claim that the subjectivity of scoring in performance-based examinations, such as speaking and writing tests, may jeopardize the credibility of the results. Elder,

Iwashita, and McNamara (2002) examine the difficulties of evaluating the complexity of oral proficiency tasks due to rater variability.

In conclusion, the differences in experts' perspectives on the design and implementation of English competency tests illustrate the multifaceted nature of language evaluation. While some academics emphasize the importance of standardized examinations in ensuring academic standards, others emphasize the necessity for more contextually sensitive and culturally fair assessments. The continuous discussion among scholars encourages critical review and improvement of language testing techniques in order to better serve the different requirements of language learners globally.

Challenges in Developing English Proficiency test

Developing an English proficiency test for a university has numerous challenges. Defining test objectives and guaranteeing test validity, selecting the appropriate format, assuring fairness and inclusion, budgeting significant costs and resources, and adjusting for specific situations are all challenging endeavors. Defining clear test goals and assuring content validity, according to Weir, C. J. (2005), can be difficult because it requires aligning the test with the specific language requirements of the university's academic programs and disciplines. Furthermore, Hughes, A. (2003) states that selecting an appropriate combination of tasks and formats to accurately test students' language ability is a considerable difficulty. In addition to test structure, maintaining fairness and inclusivity for all test takers, particularly those from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, can be difficult in test design and content production. Ede, L. (2001). Furthermore, the expense and resources required to produce a high-quality English proficiency test can be a difficulty for some universities, particularly those that have limited budgets. Brown, H. D., and P. Abeywickrama (2010). Adapting a generic English proficiency exam for specific academic contexts or target audiences can be difficult since the linguistic demands in those situations must be carefully considered (Knoch, U., 2016).

Addressing these challenges involves collaboration among language experts, assessment specialists, and educators, as well as adherence to recognized language testing and assessment guidelines. Universities can construct a rigorous English proficiency test that acts as an accurate evaluation of students' language ability and helps their academic progress by recognizing and overcoming these challenges.

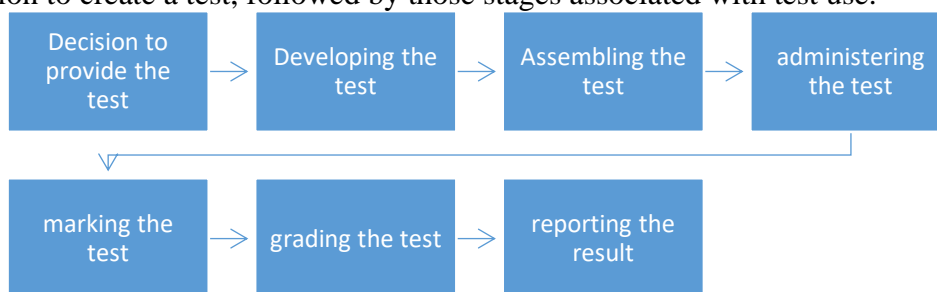
Steps in Creating English Proficiency Tests

Dealing with the significances, perspective and challenges faced in developing an English proficiency test, a comprehensive step in developing an English proficiency test is required.

Scholars and research publications have offered different strategies for developing an effective English proficiency exam. Universities and colleges can establish an

English proficiency test that reliably assesses students' language abilities, encourages academic performance, and offers equitable opportunity for all learners by following the procedures. To construct a trustworthy tool for evaluating students' language proficiency and reproducing the test, the test design must be based on known principles of language evaluation.

The construction of a language test, according to Hendriani, S and Suzanne, N (2013), includes planning the test, preparing the test items and directions, submitting the test material for review and revising based on review, pretesting the material and analyzing the results, and assembling the final form of the test. Similarly, Europe's Council (2011) writes in the Manual for Language Test Development and Examining that the phases in constructing a new test begin with the decision to create a test, followed by those stages associated with test use.



Gambar 1

The basic testing cycle (Europe's Council (2011))

1. Test development.

According to Europe's Council (2011), the goal of developing the test is to generate final test requirements. It consists of three crucial phases: planning, design, and testing.

a. Planning The Test

The planning phase is devoted to acquiring data for later stages. It entails selecting the overall course objectives, subdividing the general course objectives, and establishing the general design of the test (Hendriani, S and Suzanne, N, 2013). Furthermore, according to Alderson, J. C. (2005), a complete requirements analysis is essential to understand the language demands that students will face in their academic environment, which includes determining the language abilities required for various disciplines and academic tasks. The test objectives and target audience must be clearly specified, whether they are for prospective students seeking admission or present learners for progress evaluation. Brown, H. D., and P. Abeywickrama (2010). Aside from that, planning entails selecting appropriate test formats to examine various language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Chapelle, C. A, 2010). Choosing a variety of task kinds, including as multiple-choice questions, essays, interviews, and group discussions, can be explored.

b. Design phase

The information from planning then serves as the beginning point for the design process. Important decisions on the nature of the test are made, and preliminary

test standards are developed. These requirements outline the overall structure and substance of the test (European Council, 2011).

c. Try out phase

The goal of this phase, according to Europe's Council (2011), is to 'road test' the draft specifications and make modifications based on practical experience and ideas from stakeholders.

2. Test Use

According to Europe's Council (2011), test use consists of several stages. They are: assembling, administering, marking, and grading tests, and reporting the results.

a. Assembling tests

According to the European Council (2011), the goal of the assembling tests stage is to supply test materials that are created according to the test specifications and are ready on time. It separates the test assembly process into three basic stages: producing materials, quality control, and constructing test.

- Producing materials

In order to produce materials, a minimal degree of language skills along with an understanding of the testing context, as well as knowledge of an existing test or assessment concepts, is required. When creating a test, more items must be created than will be used because some items are almost certain to be rejected at the quality control stage.

- Quality control

Editing new materials, piloting/pretesting and/or trialling, and reviewing products are multiple instances of quality controls. After test materials have been submitted, they must be quality checked. This is accomplished by expert judgment and trial and error (European Council, 2011). According to Fulcher, G., and Davidson, F. (2007), ensuring the test content appropriately reflects the language skills being assessed and matches with the set objectives. It is possible to create relevant and authentic assessments by partnering with language experts and subject matter specialists. It is comparable to Hendriani and Suzanne, (2013) who indicate that the exam materials should be submitted to at least one person with experience in the subject matter field, such as a teacher of English.

Aside from expert judgment, some sort of testing, such as piloting, pretesting, trialling, or a mix of these methods, is employed. According to McNamara, T. (2000), a pilot test can be conducted with a small group of students to discover any errors, ambiguities, or biases in the test in order to obtain input that can be utilized to enhance and improve the assessment instrument. Pretesting, on the other hand, according to Hendriani and Suzanne (2013), all items have first been tried out on a fairly significant number of participants of the same type as those for whom the test is being prepared. Following the collection of pretest answer sheets, the items should be analyzed to establish their effectiveness in terms of the two criteria, item difficulty and discrimination. Only items that perform statistically well in the pretest are included in the final edition of the test.

Following a piloting or pre-testing session, a review meeting should be held. The goal of this meeting is to use the evidence from piloting or pretesting to keep, improve, or reject items (European Council, 2011).

- Constructing a test

Tests can be developed after sufficient resources are supplied. The goal of this phase is to develop test forms that meet the desired quality standards and meet the test specifications. The test construction stage entails balancing a variety of factors, such as test content, item difficulty, coverage, gradedness, duplication of text topics or excessive length in the reading test, and a suitable balance of male/female voices and regional accents (if relevant) in the listening test, so that the test as a whole meets the required specification (Europe's Council, 2011).

b. Administering/delivering tests

Administering/delivering tests is the next stage in test utilization. The primary goal of the test delivery procedure is to obtain accurate and reliable information about each test taker's abilities.

c. Marking tests, grading tests, and reporting test results

Following the delivery of tests, it is followed by the marking, grading, and reporting of test results. The goal of marking is to evaluate each test taker's performance and assign an accurate and reliable score to each. Grading attempts to categorize each test taker so that their test score can be more easily understood. The goal of reporting results is to provide the test taker and other stakeholders with the test result as well as any other information they require.

CONCLUSION

The development of English language proficiency tests is essential to accurately evaluate students' language proficiency, ensure academic achievement, and prepare students for success in an increasingly connected world. However, in the development process, many challenges are faced in terms of setting test objectives and ensuring test validity, selecting appropriate formats, ensuring fairness and inclusiveness, budgeting significant costs and resources, and customizing to specific situations. Therefore, collaboration between linguists, assessment specialists, and educators, as well as adherence to recognized language testing and assessment guidelines, is needed to overcome these challenges.

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