

The English Proficiency of the Academics of the Teacher Training and Education Institutions

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Abstract: The study is aimed at describing the general English proficiency level of the academics of Teacher Training and Education Institutions (LPTK's) as indicated by their TOEFL scores. Specifically, the study is focused on finding out whether there is any difference among the academics' English proficiencies when they are grouped in terms of the geographic regions of their institutions and their fields of study. This study is also intended to reveal any possible relationship between the academics' English proficiency and their age. The results indicate that the English proficiency of the academics on the average is far below the average of that of the international students. The academics in West Java are the highest in their English proficiency, and the English group, as expected, has the best English proficiency. In addition, there is a negative correlation between English proficiency and age.

Key words: English proficiency, young academics, TOEFL.

Some kind of evaluation focused on the product of the teaching of English in Indonesia can be conducted to answer the question: Have we been successful in teaching English in Indonesia? Evaluation in this context can be defined as the systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information to determine the extent to which learners have achieved their goals (Gronlund, 1985). Product evaluation can be conducted

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immediately after implementing the English language teaching programs to assess the short term effects through formal evaluations such as the National Final Examination at the elementary and secondary education levels, or the final tests at the end of the semesters at the tertiary level of education. Product evaluation can also be extended to include long term effects (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985). The long term goals of teaching English as a foreign language at schools in Indonesia can be interpreted from the function of the teaching of English in Indonesia, as stated in the formal document of the 1994 English curriculum, which is for the absorption and development of science, technology, and arts, and for the promotion of international relations, all of which can be expected to promote the development of the country (Department of Education and Culture, 1994). Globalization has promoted such functions because almost in all aspects of life, in the international world, English has powerfully dominated the other languages as the international means of communication (Graddol, 1997). The young academics at the teacher training and education institutions are among the selected few highly expected to make significant contribution to the development of the country.

The study reported in this paper is intended to provide information about the long term effects of the teaching of English at all levels of education accumulatively on the English proficiency of the academics of Teacher Training and Education Institutions. These people were considered to have the academic potentials, and therefore, were expected to continue their study at the graduate schools, either in the country or overseas. The information can then be analyzed and interpreted to make judgment about the extent to which the academics have achieved the goals of learning English in their previous education. The data, however, should be treated as contributing to the overall pictures reflecting the long-term effects of the teaching of English at the formal educational institutions.

In general, the study is aimed at describing the general English proficiency level of the academics as indicated by their TOEFL scores. Specifically, the study is focused on finding out whether there is any difference among the academics' English proficiencies when they are grouped in terms of the geographic regions of their institutions and their fields of study. In addition, this study is also intended to reveal any possible relationship between the academics' English proficiency and their age. For possible further treatment, their English proficiency can also be described

in terms of the TOEFL section scores each of which can reflect their listening and reading skills, as well as their mastery of English structure, respectively.

METHOD

This study covers 1267 academics from almost all state Institutions of Teacher Training and Education in Indonesia (32 institutions) and from Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) and Gajah Mada University (3 subjects). The data were collected in relation to the selection procedures conducted by the Graduate Program of IKIP MALANG in cooperation with the Directorate General of Higher Education projects in the efforts to recruit the academics for graduate education from 1995 to 1998.

The instrument to collect the data was a test of English proficiency equivalent to TOEFL developed by the Graduate School of IKIP MALANG. The test was concurrently validated with the International TOEFL as the criterion. From different groups of subjects, the average concurrent validity coefficients of the instrument was .654.

The data were analyzed using descriptive as well as inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics is used to depict the central tendency of the academics' English proficiency in the form of means, and their variability in the form of standard deviation. From the descriptive statistics, a set of ranking can also be developed showing the order of the academics' English proficiency levels in terms of the geographic regions of the academics' institutions and their fields of study. The inferential statistics, One-way Anova, is used to find out whether the differences among the means of each group (geographic regions of their institutions and their fields of study) are statistically significant. A correlation coefficient between the academics' English proficiency and their age is computed to reveal any possible trend of English proficiency among the academics in terms of time periods.

In the analysis, the subjects are grouped in terms of the geographic regions of their institutions and their fields of study. The geographic regions include (1) Sumatra, which covers IKIP Medan, IKIP Padang, The University of Syah Kuala, The University of Bengkulu, The University of Sriwijaya, The University of Riau, The University of Jambi, and The University of Lampung; (2) West Java (including Jakarta), which covers IKIP Jakarta, IKIP Bandung, Open University of Jakarta, and ITB; (3)

Central Java (including Yogyakarta), which covers IKIP Semarang, IKIP Yogyakarta, The University of Sebelas Maret, and Gajah Mada University; (4) East Java, which covers IKIP Surabaya, IKIP MALANG, and The University of Jember; (5) Kalimantan, which covers The University of Tanjungpura, The University of Mulawarman, and The University of Palangkaraya; (6) Sulawesi, which covers IKIP Manado, STKIP Gorontalo, The University of Tadulako, The University of Haluoleo, and IKIP Ujung Pandang; (7) Maluku and Irian, which covers The University of Pattimura and the University of Cendrawasih; and (8) East and West Nusa Tenggara, which covers STKIP Singaraja, The University of Mataram, and The University of Nusa Cendana.

Their fields of study include (1) English ($n = 40$), (2) Other Languages ($n = 78$), (3) Social Sciences ($n = 546$), and (4) Math and Natural Sciences including engineering ($n = 271$). In terms of age, the subjects can be considered as young academics ranging from 26 to 45 (mean = 36).

Since the data were collected from the documents and records of the previous activities conducted by Graduate School of IKIP MALANG in cooperation with the projects of the Directorate of Higher Education, the detailed information concerning their personal variables (their institutions, fields of study and ages) is not always available. Therefore, the analysis of the data to answer the research questions may involve different sample sizes (n).

RESULTS

The analysis of the data indicates that the mean of all scores obtained by all subjects is 390.50, which means that the English proficiency of the young academics as a group can be categorized as Intermediate. The standard deviation of the scores, which is 42.96, indicates that the total group is heterogeneous, which is also reflected from the range between the minimum score of 283 and the maximum score of 590.

When the subjects are grouped in terms of the geographic regions of their institutions (LPTK) in which they worked, the data can be described as follows: (a) The result of One-way Anova indicates that the differences among the means of the groups are statistically significant with a significance level of .0000; and (b) The descriptive statistics indicates that the geographic regions of their institutions can be ranked in terms of the academics English proficiency from the highest to the lowest as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Ranks of English Proficiency by Geographic Regions
(All Fields of Study)**

Ranks	Geographic Regions	N	Mean
1	West Java	88	401.27
2	Maluku and Irian Jaya	29	398.79
3	East Java	187	397.59
4	Sumatra	296	394.84
5	Central Java	146	393.31
6	East & West Nusa Tenggara	72	388.82
7	Kalimantan	128	382.40
8	Sulawesi	321	380.95
Total		1267	

The data indicates that West Java is in the first rank and Sulawesi is the last in terms of the English proficiency of the academics of the teacher training and education institutions.

To check whether the ranking is affected by the presence of the academics of the English Department, the data are also analyzed without including the English Department academics, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 Ranks of English Proficiency by Geographic Regions
(without English Group)**

Ranks	Geographic Regions	N	Mean
1	Maluku and Irian Jaya	18	402.83
2	West Java	67	401.24
3	East Java	154	397.22
4	Central Java	120	396.39
5	Sumatra	174	395.57
6	East & West Nusa Tenggara	44	391.93
7	Sulawesi	234	381.42
8	Kalimantan	84	372.49
Total		895	

The result indicates that Maluku and Irian Jaya region, instead of West Java, is ranked first, whereas Kalimantan, instead of Sulawesi, is ranked last.

When the subjects are grouped in terms of their fields of study, the data can be described as follows: (a) The result of One-way Anova indicates that the differences among the means of the groups are statistically significant with a significance level of .0000, and (b) the descriptive statistics indicates that the fields of study in terms of their academics' English proficiency can be ranked as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Ranks of English Proficiency by Fields of Study

Ranks	Fields of Study	N	Mean
1	English	40	473.45
2	Other Language	78	405.82
3	Math & Natural Sciences	271	398.16
4	Social Sciences	346	384.50
Total		935	

The data indicates that English group is in the first rank, as expected, and Social Sciences group is the last in terms of their English proficiency.

Correlating the academics' TOEFL scores and their age indicates that there is a negative relationship between English proficiency and age as indicated by the correlation coefficient of $-.1612$, which is statistically significant ($p = .000$). Although this coefficient indicates low correlation between age and TOEFL scores, there is a tendency that the younger the academics the higher their TOEFL scores, and the older they are the lower their scores.

The analysis of the data based on the scores of all subjects ($n = 1267$) on the three sections of TOEFL test, i.e. Listening Comprehension (Section I), Structure and Written Expression (Section II), and Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension (Section III), reveals that among the three aspects of language mastery (Listening, Reading, and Structure) the academics master Structure the best, Reading the second, and Listening the last, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Order of Difficulty among the Three Aspects of Language Mastery

Order	Aspect	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	N
1	Listening	26.67	10.51	4.00	84.00	1267
2	Reading	35.53	11.27	3.33	83.33	1267
3	Structure	37.82	15.62	5.00	92.50	1267

It should be noted that the analysis of the data on the three aspects of language mastery is done by converting the raw scores of the three TOEFL test sections into percentages so that they are comparable.

DISCUSSIONS

In comparison with the data reported by Educational Testing Service (1990), the academics' English proficiency in general can be considered to be very disappointing. According to the report, the total score mean of 23,971 Indonesians taking the International TOEFL from July 1987 through June 1989 was 496, which is far above the mean of the academics reported in this study (390.50). The total score mean of 875,897 International Participants (total group) taking the same test was 518. In terms of the percentile ranks for the International TOEFL scores of the total group who took the test from July 1987 through June 1989, the academics' position is almost in the lowest, that is, in the percentile rank of about 3.5, which means that about 96.5 percents of the total group were above the academics. According to the report, a TOEFL score of 380 is in the first percentile rank whereas a TOEFL score of 400 is in the fifth percentile rank.

The young academics, as stated earlier, were academically considered to have the potential to continue their study for higher academic degrees at graduate schools overseas. Many universities in the United States now tend to require a TOEFL score of at least 550 for the candidates to be accepted at their graduate schools. Some still require TOEFL score of 500 or above, but for fields of study like literature or law, they require a TOEFL score of 600 or above. If the TOEFL score requirement is 500, only 3.2% of the young academics, or 40 in 1267 candidates, can be accepted as students of the graduate schools; if the requirement is 550, only 0.3%, or 5 in 1267, can be accepted; and if the requirement is 600 (for literature or law majors), nobody can be sent for graduate education

abroad. The policy of the Directorate General of Higher Education now is that the academics will not be allowed to get a government scholarship to study abroad for their graduate education unless their TOEFL score is 500 or above. From the description, it can be concluded that the most difficult problem faced by an institution or a government project in charge of managing scholarship is the requirement of the candidates' English proficiency. A lot of opportunities, offered by the government projects or by foreign institutions, will be wasted just because of inadequate proficiency of English.

The situation does not look better either if the academics have to be considered for graduate education in Indonesia. Many graduate schools in Indonesia require the candidates to have a TOEFL score of 426 (the lower limit of range for the Pre-Advanced level of Proficiency, which is 426-500) in order to be accepted as their students, some even require a TOEFL score of 450. And to be students of English Education Study Program at some graduate schools, the candidates are required to have a TOEFL score of at least 475. If the TOEFL score requirement is 426, only 17.4%, or 221 in 1267, can study at the graduate schools in Indonesia. If the TOEFL score requirement is 450, only 8.8%, or 116 in 1267, can study for graduate education in Indonesia. In many graduate programs in Indonesia, however, the requirements are not very strict.

The results of data analysis about the English proficiency of the academics in terms of the geographic regions of their institutions indicate that institutions of teacher training and education in Java are not always better than those outside Java in terms of the English proficiency of the academics in general. The data as shown in Table 1 above can correct any misconceptions about differences in the quality of human resources between institutions of higher education in Java and outside Java. The same interpretation can also be applied if the English group is excluded from the analysis (see Table 2). Without the English group, the positions slightly change as indicated by the interchanging positions between Maluku/Irian Jaya and West Java groups, between Central Java and Sumatra groups, and between Sulawesi and Kalimantan groups.

The results of data analysis about the English proficiency of the academics in terms of their fields of study indicate that the English group, as expected, is much better than the other groups. However, the average English proficiency of the group is still below the expectation. The ideal expectation is that the young academics majoring in English or English

Education can continue their studies abroad. On the average, they are not ready to take the opportunity because the TOEFL score requirement to study in their majors in the United States, for example, is at least 550, which is far above their mean score (473). They can barely satisfy the TOEFL score requirement of the English Education Study Program of the graduate schools in Indonesia (475). If the requirement is strict, only 2 in 40 can study at graduate schools abroad (5%), and only 17 in 40 can study at graduate programs in Indonesia (42.5%).

The results of data analysis about the relationship between age and English proficiency indicate that there a promising tendency that the younger academics tend to have better English proficiency than the older ones. The degree of relationship (negative correlation) between the two factors may have been higher if this study had included the academics who are above 45, assuming that the English proficiency of the older academics on the average is even worse.

The data on the proficiency of the three aspects of English mastery indicate that listening comprehension is the most difficult for the academics, whereas structure is the least difficult. This situation may reflect the instructional strategies of the teaching of English at schools in Indonesia in the past: they tended to focus more on the English structure than on the English language skills.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Most of the young academics at the teacher training and education institutions are not ready to continue their study for their graduate education because their English proficiency is still below the requirement. The English proficiency of the young academics on the average is far below the English proficiency of the international students. The younger academics tend to have better potentials to be promoted academically because their English proficiency tend to be better than the older ones. In terms of the academics' English proficiency, teacher training and education institutions located closer to the central government (Jakarta) may not always mean that they are better than those located farther from the central government. Among the young academics, the mastery of language skills is still below the mastery of language components, which means that they tend to lack the skills for communication in the globalization era.

In brief, the answer to the question raised in the title of this article is 'no' if the English proficiency of the academics is used as an indicator for the long-term effect of the teaching of English in Indonesia.

Suggestions

The authorities at the institutions should consider making a policy which will promote the English proficiency of their academics in all fields of study. Setting a higher standard of English proficiency at the recruitment procedures of new academics is one example of such a policy.

More efforts should be made to improve the English proficiency levels of the academics at the international level. More intensive English programs at schools and colleges, wider use of English as means of communication in the academic activities, and more exposure to English, are just some examples of such efforts.

More opportunities of graduate education should be given to the younger academics, and when they are still young. They should not wait to take the opportunity until they get older.

The instructional activities of the English teaching programs should be more focused on the mastery of language skills than on the mastery of structure.

NOTE

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