

The Discrete Test vs the Communicative Test in Measuring the Indonesia Language Competence of Foreign Students

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Abstract

This study aims to compare the effectiveness of discrete test instruments with communicative test instruments as a measure of Indonesian language competence of foreign students. The method applied in this research is descriptive qualitative. The subjects of this study are foreign students which are studying Indonesian language in Indonesia whom categorized as beginner level learners. Data collection was collected by test technique then analyzed its functionality as a measure of Indonesian language competence of foreign students. The results of the analysis show that: (1) the form of discrete tests is effectively used to measure the receptive language competence, i.e. listening and reading; (2) the form of communicative test is effectively used to measure the competence of productive language, i.e. writing and speaking; (3) grammar and vocabulary competence tests are more effective if they are integrated in listening, reading, writing and speaking competency tests. Thus, it can be concluded that the discrete tests and the communicative tests can be collaborated as a measuring instrument to deeply explore the competence of Indonesian language for the foreign students as the beginner level.

Keywords: *Discrete Test; Communicative Test; Indonesian Language; Foreign Students*

1. INTRODUCTION

The competence test of Indonesian language for the foreign students (BIMA) is a test which developed for the special purposes. The BIMA test is a type of proficiency test used to measure the Indonesian language competence of foreign students who studying the Indonesian language in Indonesia. An expert had stated that proficiency test is designed to measure people's ability in language regardless of any training they may have had in that language. The content of proficiency test, therefore, is not based on the content or objectives of language course which people taking the test may have followed [1]–[4].

The BIMA test was developed specifically to test the competence of written and spoken language, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing that is limited to BIPA 1 and BIPA 2 levels. BIPA 1 is oriented towards the ability of foreign students to understand and use expressions of self-introduction and fulfillment context in everyday concretely and routine with a simple way to communicate with partners who are very cooperative. BIPA 2 is oriented towards the ability to express feelings simply, describe the surrounding environment, and communicate daily needs and routine.

A good language competence test is a test that is fully capable of measuring four language skills at a time, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing competencies. The assessment of language competence should be conducted in an authentic, not discrete or partial way. In fact, the assessment which is conducted by applying the test technique is still needed because the authentic assessment technique takes a lot of time [4][5].

The test of language competence specifically can be divided into several categories. [6][7] describe that language tests can be categorized into several types, namely: (1) discrete; (2) integrative; (3) pragmatics; and (4) communicative. Specifically in this article will only discuss about the discrete tests and communicative tests.

The discrete test is a test that only emphasizes or concerns on one aspect of language at a time. Each one item question is intended to measure only one aspect of language, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, or vocabulary. The discrete test is not only about the linguistic aspect, but also concern on the variety of language skills. If a test which is conducted specifically intended to measure only one language skill, such as only listening, reading, speaking, or writing, without relating to other competences, such language competence test is belonged to discrete test. Thus, the competence test of listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be taken separately. Receptive and productive skills should be tested in different test [8] [6].

The communicative test is based on the view that language usage should be appropriate to everyday communication. The communicative approach emphasizes on the role of the elements of non-adherence, especially concern on the elements which are associated with the implementation of good manner communication [9][10] stated that “in testing communicative language ability we are evaluating samples of performance, in certain specific contexts of use, created under particular test constraints, for what they can tell us about a candidate’s communicative capacity or language ability.” In that definition, Weir showed several key words in communicative language tests, namely: (1) communicative language skills, (2) the use of specific context, (3) test constraints, and (4) the capacity.

The communicative language skills as a qualification framework for describing language knowledge and language capacity to be implemented in the context of appropriate language communication. The communicative language competence test emphasizes on the importance of language function as a communicative function. Communicative competence is a competence to understand and use the language in factual and reasonable communication activities according to the context of the conversation. The communicative competence includes grammatical, socio-lingual, contextual, and strategic competencies [11]–[14].

2. METHOD

The method applied in this research is descriptive qualitative. The subjects of this study are foreign students who studying the Indonesian language in Indonesia which is categorized as

the beginner level learners, namely BIPA 1 and BIPA 2. Data collections were conducted by the test technique. The test consists of tests of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The test instrument is developed in accordance with the basic competence and competence standards that are specifically based on the BIPA 1 and BIPA 2 levels. The test results are analyzed for their functionality as a measure of Indonesian language competence of foreign students.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The product specifications developed to measure these four skills which are described as follows.

3.1 The Listening Test

The listening test has aim to measure the listening competence of foreign students as follows.

- a. Recognize simple words and phrases related to information from others: name, address, occupation, home country, family, and other things when others people speak slowly and clearly.
- b. Recognize simple words and phrases related to direction, location, environment, and daily activities.
- c. Interpret simple expressions from known and unknown people who speak clearly.
- d. Responding to utterances and phrases that are often used and relevant to their interests in public places on their daily life, e.g. at bank, ATM, immigration office, hospital, campus, library, etc.
- e. Identify important information contained in text in the form of instructions, announcements, conversations, etc.
- f. Interpret information related to their needs, such as education, health, social interaction, and entertainment from simple text in electronic media. Examples: ads, news, soap operas, songs, poems, and more.

3.2 The Speaking Test

The speaking test has aims to measure the speaking competence of foreign students as follows.

- a. Revealing simple phrases relating to personal and other information, such as: name, address, occupation, home country, family, etc.
- b. Expressing and asking questions about the direction, location, environment, and daily activities.
- c. Responding with a simple expression if someone else talks to them.
- d. Exchanging information on everyday activities that occur in public places, e.g. opening an account at a bank, taking money at an ATM, filling out the completeness of immigration form, medication at the hospital, and borrowing books at the library.
- e. Conducting a short conversation relates to simple and routine tasks.
- f. Describing the feelings, self-background, around environmentm, and things related to their needs, such as education, helath, social interaction, and entertainment.

3.3 The Reading Test

The reading test has aims to measure the reading competence of foreign students as follows.

- a. To be able to read aloud the short and simple text related to personal information: name, address, occupation, country of origin, family, and others.
- b. To be able to find information related to direction, location, environment, and daily activities such as advertisements, maps, announcements, menus, and schedules.
- c. To be able to find information from short and simple text, e.g. personal letter.
- d. To be able to read procedural text contained in public places, i.e. in bank, ATM, immigration office, hospital, campus, library, etc.
- e. To be able to perform simple and routine tasks in accordance with the contents of the text in the form of instructions, commands, procedures, etc.
- f. To be able to abstract the description texts about feelings, self-background, surrounding environment, and things related to their needs, such as education, health, social interaction, and entertainment.

3.4 The Writing Test

The writing test has aims to measure the writing competence of the foreign students with the criteria as follows.

- a. To be able to fill the forms related to personal information, such as name, address, occupation, country of origin, family, and others.
- b. To be able to write short and simple sentences relating to directions, locations, and daily activities for the fulfillment of the concrete needs.
- c. To be able to write short and simple narrative texts, for example, tells the story of an experience through a personal letter.
- d. To be able to write procedural texts related to activities in public places, e.g. opening an account at a bank, taking money at an ATM, filling out the completeness of immigration forms, medication in the hospital, and borrowing books in the library.
- e. To be able to write texts related to simple and routine tasks, for example: writing instructions, command, procedures, etc.
- f. To be able to write non-formal texts about feelings, self-background, surrounding environment, and things related to their needs, such as education, health, social interaction, and entertainment. For examples: personal letters, letters from readers, simple poems, short messages, etc.

The Indonesian competence test is given to two different groups, the first group was tested by using a discrete test instrument and the second group was tested by using a communicative test instrument. The questions of discrete test group were presented in the form of multiple choice test and essays. Multiple-choice test is used to measure the listening and reading competencies. The multiple choice test is carried out to choose the correct answer in order to measure the competence of grammar and vocabulary mastery. The test of writing and speaking competence are conducted separately. The second group was tested by using communicative test instrument, namely listening, reading, speaking, and writing competency test which were conducted in one time test. The way to answer the questions of communicative test is by supplying the answer (not choosing the answer).

The test in the first group (discrete test) was followed by 17 foreign students. The placement test consists of reading, grammar, and writing tests. The reading test consists of 10

question items which presented in the form of multiple choices, while the grammar test was presented in the form of choosing one of the two alternative answers provided, and the writing test was conducted by the students were asked to argue about the Indonesia with the help of Indonesian map picture. Based on the result of the placement test, it is known that two students are able to answer well then four students are able to answer well enough, five students answered with poor results, and six students answered with bad answers. The result data of the discrete test indicates the existence of an unreliable (not reliable) between the score values of listening, reading, grammar, speaking, and writing competencies.

The second group test was followed by 18 foreign students. Students were tested their competence of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Based on the results of tests that have been implemented, it is known that from 18 foreign students who have taken the test, most of the students have trouble in doing the type of listening and reading questions that ask them to answer questions by supplying answers.

The results of the analysis show that: (1) the form of discrete tests is effectively used to measure the receptive language competence, i.e. listening and reading; (2) the form of communicative test is effectively used to measure the competence of productive language, i.e. writing and speaking; (3) grammar and vocabulary competence tests are more effective if they are integrated in listening, reading, writing and speaking competency tests. Thus, it can be concluded that the discrete tests and the communicative tests can be collaborated as a measuring instrument to deeply explore the competence of Indonesian language for the foreign students as the beginner level.

The test is one of the tools used to measure competence. As a measuring instrument, the test instrument must be able to perform its function properly. Theoretically, the communicative test is considered as better than the discrete tests. However, in reality the discrete test is still relevant to be used under certain conditions. This can be analogous to someone who will cut the sponge cake that would be precisely by using a small knife and not too sharp, does not need to use a saw.

The result above is reinforced by the study conducted [15] entitled Construct Validation of TOEFL-iBT (as a Conventional Test) and IELTS (as a Task-based Test) among Iranian EFL Test-takers' Performance on Speaking Modules can be inferred that there is not significantly different between the test result of construct validity of the speaking competence test of TOEFL iBT and IELTS, even the TOEFL iBT belongs to conventional test category, whereas IELTS categorized as test based on the real situation [15].

The test materials should be considered as important things in the test instrument development of language competence. [16]on their research entitled The Effect of Authentic and Inauthentic Materials in Cultural Awareness Training on EFL Learner Listening Comprehension Ability concluded that authentic materials could be more effective than inauthentic materials in improving the listening comprehension ability of EFL learners at the intermediate level. The research that had been conducted by Barekat and Nobakhti is different from the result of this study. One of the things that distinguished is the level of skill of the test participants. The test participants on this study are foreign students who learn Indonesian language as the beginner-level learners so that the test materials are more relevant to artificial. It is because of the limitations of the test participants schemata.

Evidence that the test technique was more effective stated in a study conducted by [17]which concluded that the contextualized nature of the C-test seems to be able to explain

large amounts of variance in measures of receptive language skills. The C-test, being a reliable, economical and robust measure, appears to be an ideal candidate for placement and screening purposes. In a side-line of their study, they also explored different scoring approaches for the Yes–No format. They found that using the hit rate and the false-alarm rate as two separate indicators yielded the most reliable results. These indicators can be interpreted as measures for vocabulary breadth and as guessing factors respectively, and they allow controlling for guessing.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that in the development of Indonesian language competency test for foreign students there are some aspects that affect the quality of test instruments that have been developed. Some of the influencing aspects are the level of test participants, the material tested, and the type of developed test. There are several strengths and weaknesses of each type of test.

Communicative tests has the following strengths: (1) appropriate to assess thinking processes involving high-level cognitive activity and not merely remembering and understanding facts or concepts; (2) forcing test participants to bring their answers into a coherent language according to their own style; (3) do not attempt lucky chance; (4) easy to organize and do not spend much time. The weaknesses of communicative test: (1) the level of validity and reliability is low; (2) the answer is not easily standardized; (3) need more time to correct and make the score. There are several attempts to reduce the weaknesses of subjective test, i.e. (1) indicators and materials selected for testing should be the main test material that represents indicators and non-fixing materials; (2) there is a limit to the correct answer; (3) it is necessary to develop certain criteria that serve as guidelines.

The discrete test has several strengths, including: (1) indicators and materials tested are in a comprehensive form; (2) allows only one correct answer; and (3) easily corrected. The weaknesses of discrete test are as follows: (1) the preparation of objective tests takes a relatively long time; (2) the answer test producing may be in lucky of chance; and (3) it will cost a lot to multiply the test instrument. Efforts that can be made to reduce the weaknesses of discrete test are: (1) the preparation of items based on the grid; (2) the test instrument is used more than once; (3) the use of discrete and communicative tests in combined.

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