

Investigating Students' English Competence in Participating Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) Program

Didik Hartono¹, Esti Junining², Isti Purwaningtyas³
{didik_htono@ub.ac.id¹, esti@ub.ac.id², tyaz_wijaya@ac.ub.ic³}

Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia^{1, 2, 3}

Abstract. This study investigates the English competence of 69 non-English Department students through English proficiency test prediction using descriptive qualitative analysis as its method. The scores categorize all occurrences of communicative competence, using the thematic categories provided by the CEFR framework. It finds that the students' TOEFL scores were mostly in the basic category. There were 43 students. 26 students were in the independent user category. The result shows that they are predominantly basic users, further research is needed to develop materials in order to be able to prepare materials for students so that they achieve independent and proficient user categories, and become literate and ready to take part in the MBKM program.

Keywords: English Competence, MBKM

1 Introduction

The Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture has recently implemented Program Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) or Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus for universities where students are able to choose certified internship, independent student exchange, certified independent teaching campus and study projects programs offered by the government. The purpose of MBKM is to facilitate students to meet the opportunity to master practical knowledge and acquire useful skills for their future careers. This policy provides students with numerous opportunities to broaden, deepen, and improve their understanding and competence in the work life environment in accordance with their potential, talents, interests, spirit, and ideas. Many university graduates struggle to meet industrial or company demands because of many of factors, including a lack of skills, experience, and the traits required in the employment area due to a lack of university-user collaboration [1]. Through close cooperation between universities and the work field, universities will present as a wellspring for the progress and development of the nation, as well as directly color the nation's culture and civilization.

With this strategy, graduates' non-technical skills (soft skills) and technical skills (hard skills) will improve, so that graduates are more prepared and in line with the needs of the era, and are more capable as future leaders of the nation with great personality. [2]. MBKM invites industry partners to contribute in preparing a work-ready generation by providing the opportunity of internship and independent study for students. The experiential learning program with adaptable approaches is designed to help students reach their full potential in compliance with their abilities. Students can also take part in the learning process to fulfill part of the time

and burden of studying in the study program and the rest outside the study program. For students, the essence of MBKM is the opportunity to take 1 (one) semester or equivalent to 20 (twenty) credits of learning outside of their study program at the same university, and a maximum of 2 (two) semesters or equivalent to 40 (forty) credits of learning in the same study program at different universities, learning in different study programs at different universities, or learning outside universities [3].

Most users want people that not only have high academic accomplishment but also excellent communication abilities, particularly in English [3]. As mentioned by Rickheit and Strohner [4] the ability of an individual to succeed in their social life depends on their communicative competence. Good communication skills in the workplace refer to the capacity to clearly convey and receive information, as well as the capacity to comprehend the audience in order to avoid and resolve problems. It implies that communication is crucial, and that individuals must be communicative. In this situation, English learners must be able to communicate in English in order to compete in today's society. Specialized expertise combined with excellent communication skills, especially English competence is needed for fresh graduates to secure jobs. As a communication tool, language is not only used in written form but also oral representation communicatively and contextually [5]. In the case of using English, learners need to train their communicative skills by practicing more to shape their habits until they feel confident to use spoken or written English. In addition, having the communicative skills competencies helps passing English examination, obtaining the best score in TOEFL/IELTS, looking for scholarships to continue study abroad, getting more information in English, writing job application letters and also job interviews. In brief, communicative skill is a required skill in many aspects of a community in order to have a broader opportunity in social life.

Linguistic competence is gained by interaction with language speakers in contextual factors. The elements of English core competencies (listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) and communicative competence (communicative competences refer to the learner's ability to use language as determined by language knowledge, skills, and attitude, including grammatical, sociolinguistics, discourse, and strategic competence) must be learned and studied integratively by the students. There are several types of English tests that have been internationally tested and accepted as a method for testing one's English competence. Among these are the IELTS and TOEFL tests, which are progressively becoming the most popular. These two examinations have different formats, but they each measure students' English competency in their own way. To equalize the English proficiency score as a standard indicator *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) helps to indicate the level of language ability and qualification of English proficiency globally.

This paper is intended to measure the level of students' English proficiency as an effort to prepare students to take MBKM programs. The specific purpose of this research is to find out, obtain data and information regarding: (1) English language skills have been mastered by students. (2) English language skills that need to be improved based on test results. (3) The input that can be suggested to the curriculum development on current English learning so that the material taught is useful in the work life. To figure out the students' English levels of proficiency thoroughly, the researcher compares their TOEFL scores to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which allows the researcher to map the students' scores based.

2 Research Method

This study investigates the English competence of 69 non-English Department students through English proficiency test prediction organized and developed internally by the university language center. Using descriptive quantitative analysis as its method and stratified random sampling. The stratified random sampling technique was employed to obtain a representative sample by investigating the various non-english department students population, which was stratified and consisted of many heterogeneous departments taken as representative sample. The study examines how students' TOEFL results reflect their communication skills.

Table 1. Respondents

Department	Level	Number of Participant
Law	Bachelor	4
Physics	Bachelor	4
Chinese Literature	Bachelor	5
Agricultural Technology	Bachelor	1
Instrumentation	Bachelor	5
Architecture	Bachelor	5
Psychology	Bachelor	5
Indonesian Language and Literature	Bachelor	5
Public Administration	Bachelor	5
Hotel Management	Bachelor	5
Computer science	Bachelor	6
Biology	Bachelor	5
Animal Science	Bachelor	5
Mathematic	Bachelor	5
Fisheries and Marine Science	Bachelor	5

To get a better idea of the students' English competence, the researcher compares their TOEFL scores to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which allows the researcher to map the students based on their scores. The CEFR is divided into six stages, as shown in Table 2 [6].

Table 2. Six Levels of CEFR

C2	Mastery	Proficient
C1	Effective operational proficiency	
B2	Vantage	Independent
B1	Threshold	
A2	Waystage	Basic
A1	Breakthrough	

3 Results and Discussion

MBKM for university students where students are able to choose offered study programs to master practical knowledge and acquire useful skills for their future careers. Kampus Merdeka invites industry partners contributing to preparing a work-ready generation by providing the opportunity of internship and independent study for students. To be able to participate in some programs of MBKM requires English competence. This study investigates the English competence of 69 non-English Department students through English proficiency test prediction. The study analyzes how the concept of communicative competence is represented in students' TOEFL results using descriptive quantitative analysis as a method.

Tabel 3. The students' competence based on CEFR

CEFR Level	Level User	Number of participant
C2	Proficient	0
C1		0
B2	Independent	8
B1		18
A2	Basic	43
A1		0

Table 3 demonstrates that no student has a TOEFL score that is competent. It finds that the participants' TOEFL scores were mostly in the basic users category. There were 43 students. 26 students were in the independent users category. The result shows that they are predominantly basic users. Shanks [7] states that "there is no 'passing' or 'failing' score on the TOEFL. However, companies or institutions usually set a minimum TOEFL score for admission on average 450 to 550. Almost all of the job advertisements require English skills which is to appeal to those who learn English, or to those who want to expand their existing English skills.

In fact, 62% participants had a 337-459 score which is considered at the basic level. According to the CEFR descriptor, participants with an A2 level can (1) understand sentences and frequently used expressions in areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, and employment); and (2) can understand language and commonly used idioms in areas of least immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, and employment). (2) may communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine subjects; (3) can convey features of his or her background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate need in simple words. 26% of total participants had 460-542 score which is considered the independent users. Based on the CEFR descriptor, Independent users on B1 (1) can grasp the main points of clear standard input on well-known subjects often used in work, education, leisure, and other settings; (2) can cope with the huge percentage of situations that are likely to arise while travelling in an area in which the language is spoken; (3) can produce simple connected text on subjects that are closely associated or of self-interest.; (4) can offer brief arguments and explanations for ideas and plans, as well as recount events and experiences, as well as goals, objectives, and intentions.

Only 12% of all participants achieved independent user on the B2 level, which means they can: (1) grasp the relevant aspects of a difficult text on both tangible and abstract issues, including technical talks in his or her field of expertise; (2) interact with native speakers with a level of fluency and spontaneity that allows regular interaction with native speakers without

strain for either party; (3) produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a variety of concepts. The lowest score among listening, structure, and reading is reading followed by structure score. Being exposed to the finding, there are several recommendations which can be proposed to improve the participants' score in reading and structure. Firstly, teaching strategies and activities need to be created to strengthen students' test-taking abilities, and build their critical reading skills in order to increase their reading test scores. We assume that by better connecting material we teach in our other intensive English programs to abilities tested on the TOEFL, we can reduce resistance to certain activities. Secondly, TOEFL test requires to be conducted annually so data about the students' English competence is always updated for any purpose. This finding can suggest that TOEFL preparation class has an important role in improving the students' TOEFL score.

4 Conclusion

43 out of 69 participants on the basic level of English proficiency, they do not meet the demand of the workplace setting requirement. Only 26 participants achieved independent users and were ready to take part in MBKM programs. It is suggested for the pedagogical implications that curriculum developers need to focus on giving guidance to practical communication for English use and to prepare students to face work life. In addition, the students are able to obtain more opportunities in being familiar with the TOEFL test. Further research is needed to develop materials in order to be able to prepare materials for students so that they achieve independent and proficient user categories, and become literate and ready to take part in the MBKM program as well as work life.

References

- [1] M. Arbarini, S. Jutmini, S. Joyoatmojo, and S. Sutarno, "Effect of participatory learning model on functional literacy education," *J. Nonform. Educ.*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 13–24, 2018.
- [2] A. Blust, "The Debate Over Outcome Based Education," *News & Views*, 1995.
- [3] H. Le, J. Janssen, and T. Wubbels, "Collaborative learning practices: teacher and student perceived obstacles to effective student collaboration," *Cambridge J. Educ.*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 103–122, 2018.
- [4] G. Rickheit and H. Strohner, *Handbook of communication competence*, vol. 1. Walter de Gruyter, 2008.
- [5] Daryanto and M. Rahardjo, *Model pembelajaran inovatif*. Yogyakarta: Gava Media, 2012.
- [6] D. Philips, "Longman Introductory Course for the TOEFL Test: The Paper Test." New York: Pearson Education, 2004.
- [7] J. Shanks, *TOEFL Paper-and-Pencil*. Simon and Schuster, 2004.