



## **MASTER STUDENTS' READINESS IN TAKING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST DURING THE PANDEMIC TIME**

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### **ABSTRACT**

English Proficiency Test becomes a compulsory standard for higher education settings. Students need to perform their best capability, so they can obtain their expected score. Meanwhile, way of learning changed significantly due to Covid-19 pandemic. Students had to adjust the shifting way of learning from face-to-face meeting to online learning. The study aimed to investigate master students' readiness in taking English Proficiency Test during the pandemic due to shifting way of learning from face-to-face to online learning. The research employed mixed-method study by using phenomenology approach as the qualitative inquiry, and descriptive analysis was used as the quantitative investigation. Qualitative data were taken through interview, and quantitative data were obtained by using questionnaire. Based on the results of the study, it can be known that respondents did not perform their good self-efficacy in doing their English Proficiency Test. Meanwhile, respondents needed to adjust the shifting of learning way during pandemic because they should be more independent by learning the materials individually.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy, readiness, English Proficiency Test

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

English proficiency test becomes a compulsory standard for higher education settings in Indonesia. The form of the tests varies based on each university's regulation. Test and examinations have always been used as mechanisms of social policy and control, with the gate-keeping role of tests often justifying their existence (Alderson, 2001). Some universities have owned their own standardized English proficiency test with various names, and some of them use international widely known English proficiency tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC as their assessment standard in determining the students' English capability. English proficiency test should be taken by all students in higher education settings to complete one of various graduating requirements or passing particular stage requirements such as passing thesis proposal or dissertation proposal. A particular score of English proficiency test should be fulfilled by students especially those who are taking masters or doctoral programs because English becomes the first-highly-used language in international journals and other sources. Once students are able to fulfill the required score, it is assumed that their proficiency is capable to support their educational process especially in understanding English journals or literatures.

Although English has been taught mostly from primary schools until universities, which means that students have learnt English for more than 10 years, a lot of students still find it difficult to complete English proficiency test requirement. Test-related instruction and test-driven student study patterns were more predominant at schools with English proficiency requirements than their counterparts. However, this policy appears to have had insignificant impact on student learning because it seems clear that many students do not turn their English classes into certification-test training sessions (Pan & Newfields , 2014 ). Actually, test users should choose tests that have been established in ways that effort to make them as fair as possible for test takers of different races, gender, ethnic backgrounds, or handicapping condition (Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education in Kunnan, 2001). In translating this statement, test users should be aware of what test that they should take and how they attempt the test to acquire the outcome as fair as possible regardless their races, gender, ethnicity, and disability. It means that test takers should understand the test that they take. Understanding test can be translated in many ways. In this term, readiness is significantly needed when test takers are willing to take the required test whatever their purposes are.

The main objective of the new English test for postgraduates is to determine their ability in the English language to be able to cope academically in universities (Abidin & Jamil , 2015 ). To minimize the obstacles faced by test takers (especially the university students), sometimes universities provide assistance in the term of educational access. Educational access refers to whether or not a test is accessible to test takers (university students) in terms of opportunity to learn the content and to become accustomed with the types of test and cognitive demands (Kunnan, 2001). The opportunity to learn English proficiency test is conducted by institutions (universities) in the form of various ways such as conducting pretest for freshmen, providing preparation class before the students take English proficiency test, and setting the minimum score of English proficiency test.

Before the pandemic era, test preparation can be done in the form of face-to-face meetings. Face-to-face meetings is viewed as more conducive to the learning practice, providing better chance to sharing knowledge and asking for assistance, “easier” and more interactive, and more well-suited with the needs of students (Miliszewska, 2007). Students find it easier to have face-to-face meeting because they have greater engagement to the educational environment, materials taught, tutors as well as peer’s assistance. However, due to the spread of Covid-19 virus all around the world, face-to-face meetings in education settings is strictly limited in order to suppress the spread of the virus. Almost all educational activities are conducted online by using e-learning platforms and interface applications. Technology based teaching online education has become the most suitable alternative to keep educational activities functional in many parts of the world during the pandemic period (Paudel , 2021). As a result, students need to have a high commitment in online learning to solve their problem by searching as much as information through various medias because they cannot lean heavily on the role of teachers and peer’s assistance. Although online platforms offer abundant sources of learning, students have several obstacles in becoming independent learners such as limited time and access of the internet, inability to manage their educational needs, limited capability to understand particular materials due to language obstacle, and low self-efficacy in learning independently.

Hence, the study aimed to analyze the readiness of master students in taking English proficiency test during the pandemic time. Master students' readiness in taking English proficiency test is significant to be analyzed because this test becomes a compulsory requirement to proceed students' graduation steps. Meanwhile, some students find it difficult to fulfill the required score. Before the pandemic time, students might have more time to share their problems related to English proficiency test with their peers as well as their supervisors. However, during the pandemic students are obliged to be more independent to prepare the test by using their own steps and ways. The study was conducted to determine how ready master students' in taking English proficiency test during the pandemic time, how well they prepare their English proficiency test independently, and what obstacles they have during preparing themselves in taking English proficiency test using online medias.

The study on master students' readiness in taking English proficiency test during the pandemic time becomes a novel research since previous studies mostly focus on students' readiness in using digital media and online learning (Kusel , Martin , & Markic, 2020; Tuntirojanawong, 2013). Students' readiness in learning through blended learning environment have become a focus study in a research conducted in Thailand (Sriwichai , 2020). Meanwhile, a study related to English proficiency test was also conducted with different subjects of the study namely the first year university students (Yuyun , Meyling, Laksana , & Abednego , 2018 ). In term of learning readiness among students, several studies have been conducted; one of them is learning readiness and educational achievement among school students (Dangol & Shrestha, 2019) (Winarso , 2016). In addition, studies on assessing readiness using self-efficacy (Park, Kenny, Burton , Qayyum , & Van Neste-Kenny , 2012) and the conceptual model for students' readiness (DiBenedetto & Myers , 2016) were also conducted in the previous researches.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Readiness in learning becomes a significant thing to determine the success of learning outcome (Sriwichai , 2020). Readiness contributes highly to the students' educational achievement because it becomes one of influential aspects to ease the learning process. Creating learning readiness among students is crucial tasks for achieving high educational accomplishment among students. Thus, the absence of learning readiness spoils the teaching process which means every effort turns meaningless in academia (Dangol & Shrestha, 2019). Readiness for learning refers to the readiness to perform learning activities and the students existing capacities which related to a specific instructional purpose. Learning goals can be achieved when students learning is supported by their readiness. Students' readiness can help them to adjust themselves better under difficult circumstances. It is easier for them to understand problems and find solutions (Sriwichai , 2020).

In term of readiness in performing online learning, students have to aware on several aspects such as time management, access availability, materials accessibility, and the role of teachers in learning processes. Online learning has the potential to bring instructors, peers, and resources together virtually at the point-of-care to support students safety and evidence-informed practice (Park, Kenny, Burton , Qayyum , & Van Neste-Kenny , 2012). Online learning needs higher individual readiness and commitment because it has limited interface meeting both with the teachers as the facilitators and with the peers to discuss the problem and limitation of learning process. Although new technology offers a lot of interesting activities for students to learn English independently, there are only 26.7% students had mobile application in their cell phone,

and 19.4% of the students never use mobile application to learn English (Rahayu , 2019). In fact, It is impossible to master any language with a very limited exposure since mastering language can only be achieved by repetitively use it to obtain maximum result (Rahayu & Putri , 2018).

Individual readiness and commitment require students to have high self-efficacy in learning English more independently. High self-efficacy influences the behavior of readiness for change (Emsza , Eliyana , & Istyarini, 2016). Shifting a condition from face-to-face meetings mostly facilitated by teachers or instructor to online settings which need individual commitment needs a great effort to students. Hence, high self-efficacy is importantly needed to shift students' mindset and steps of learning. Individuals' self-efficacy judgements differ on three interrelated dimensions: magnitude, strength, and generalizability (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 2006; Compeau & Higgins, 1995). Magnitude refers to the level of task difficulty individuals believe they can attain. Those with high online class self-efficacy would believe they were able to use their individual capacity to accomplish difficult and sophisticated task, while those with low mobile self-efficacy would think they were only able to use them for limited and simple tasks. The level of confidence people have in their capacity to execute specific activities is referred to as self-efficacy strength (e.g., their level of confidence in their ability to easily learn and use the various features of, and applications provided by, mobile devices). Finally, self-efficacy generalizability measures how much a person's judgment is restricted to a certain activity domain. Individuals with high mobile self-efficacy generalizability expect to be able to operate a number of devices well, whereas those with low computer self-efficacy generalizability may believe their abilities to be limited to specific devices, particularly those with which they are familiar (Park, Kenny, Burton , Qayyum , & Van Neste-Kenny , 2012).

Hence, the self-efficacy among students in using online media to enhance their score of English proficiency test needs to be examined since the pandemic has brought immense difference in teaching and learning.

### **3. METHOD**

The study applied mixed method research combining qualitative and quantitative method. Mixed method was used to obtain the depth and breadth of the study. Quantitative data were obtained through online questioner given to all respondents of the study. Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained through structured interview to all respondents of the study and in-depth-interview to ten selected respondents based on four criteria (very ready, ready, less ready, not ready). There were 77 respondents who filled the online survey. All of them were students of magister of Midwifery in a private university in Yogyakarta. The study was conducted in 2020; it was the year when Covid-19 virus newly spread all around the world. All parties including educational institutions had to adapt with new condition and regulation due to government policy to minimize the mobility of all citizens and to keep the people to stay at home.

The method of the study covers several steps; first of all, the researcher found out the respondents of the study through a preparation class of English proficiency test provided by the university. Secondly, after students finishing the preparation class, questioners as the data source of quantitative study and structured interviews as the source of qualitative study were distributed; then the researcher analyzed the result of questionnaire based on the classified criteria. The next step was to determine 4 respondents as the informants of in-depth-interview technique. In-depth-interview to 4 respondents that included the criteria was conducted online using WhatsApp video call.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the study implies three main factors of self-efficacy namely magnitude, strength, and generalizability. Before analyzing those three factors, the characteristics of the respondents are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
20 – 24 year	54	70.1%
25 – 29 year	10	13%
30 – 34 year	10	13%
35 – 39 year	1	1.3%
>40 year	2	2.6%
<b>Learning English Duration</b>		
1 year	11	14.3%
2 year	1	1.3%
3 year	6	7.8%
4 year	5	6.5%
5 year	8	10.4%
5-10 year	23	29.9%
>10 year	23	29.9%
<b>Number of taking EPT test</b>		
1x	20	26%
2x	21	27.3%
3x	18	23.4%
More than 3x	18	23.4%

All respondents were students of magister midwifery program, so all of the respondents were female. There were 77 students who participated in this study. The range of the age varied from 22 year to 43 year; it might happen since the respondents were from magister program. The highest percentage is from respondents' age range 20-24 year (70.1%). All of them joined a compulsory English Proficiency Test Course provided by the university to freshmen of Magister Midwifery Program. Previously, before the pandemic, English Proficiency Test (EPT) courses were organized offline. However, the preparation class was the first online English Proficiency Test course provided by the university because Covid-19 pandemic forced people to have more activities at home.

Hence, students needed to shift the way of learning from offline to online class. In this regard, self-efficacy was significantly needed to gain students' confidence in learning something with a new way of learning. In order to analyze the aspects of self-efficacy in students three components namely magnitude, strength, and generalizability were analyzed.

- Magnitude

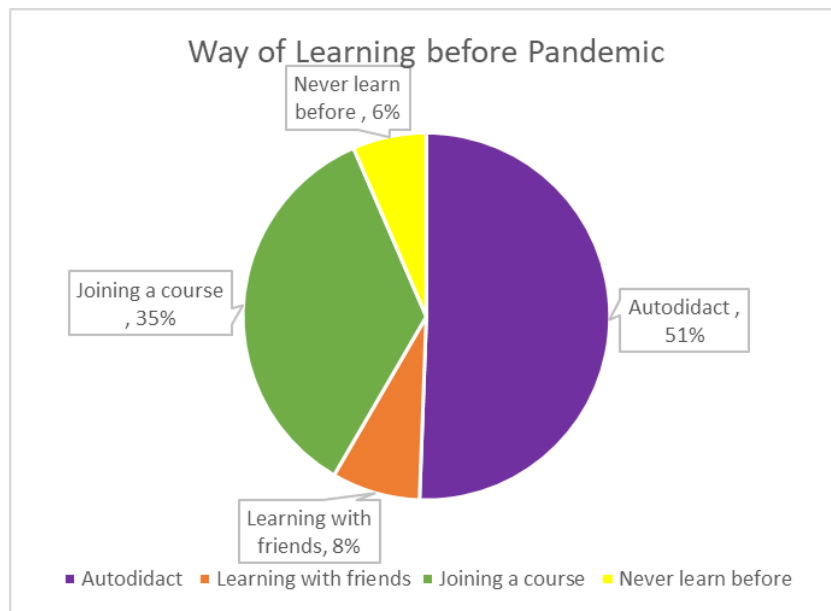
Magnitude is concerned with whether or not a person believes he or she can complete the task. It describes how tough it is for a person to acquire a new behavior. The researcher asked the respondents how they learned English Proficiency Test before the pandemic and how they changed the method of learning during the pandemic.

Based on the data obtained, most of the respondents (93.5%) learned English Proficiency Test. The respondents believed that they could complete their task in achieving their English Proficiency Test score by doing several ways of learning such as Autodidact (50.6%), Learning with friends (7.8%), and joining a course (35.1%).

Meanwhile, respondents' number of taking test showed that 20 respondents (26%) took the test once; 21 respondents (27.3%) did the test twice; 18 respondents (23.4%) respondents took the test three times, and the rest of them (18 respondents/23.4%) took the test for more than three times. Based on the interview related to the reason why the respondents took more than once test, respondents had various reasons why they took English proficiency test for more than once. One of the reasons was because they had not achieved a required score, so they needed to take more opportunities to achieve the required score.

- Strength

Strength reflects an individual's confidence at completing the various components of the task or at various levels of difficulty. The result of the study, however, only few respondents stated that they had never learned (6.5%) English Proficiency Test. The following pie chart shows respondents' way of learning English Proficiency Test.



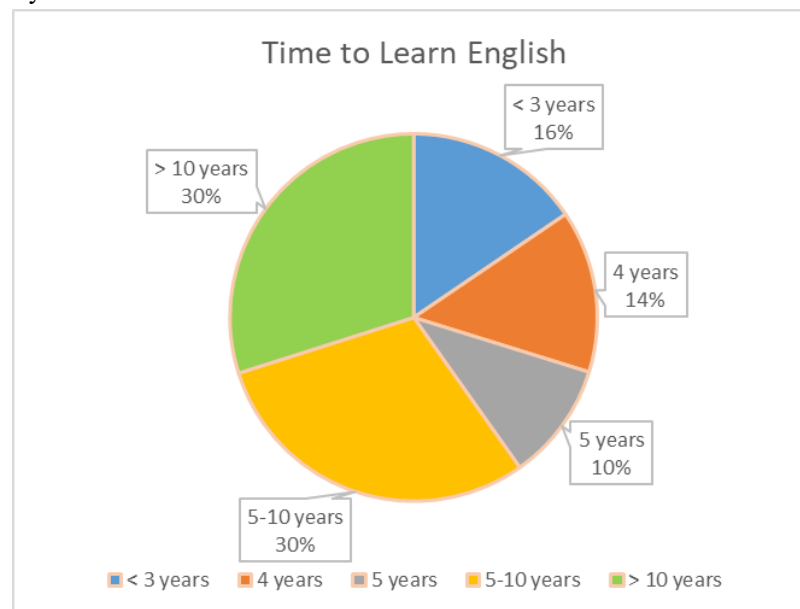
It shows that respondents had a high level of magnitude because more than 50% of respondents stated that they learned English Proficiency Test autodidactically. By having an autodidact way of learning, respondents believed that they could complete the task without the help of other people.

However, when the researcher asked the respondents if they were satisfied with the result of their test scores, the results of survey analysis stated differently. The respondents (68.8%) stated that they were not satisfied with their EPT score, and 31.2% of them stated that they were satisfied with their results. Majority, the reason why they were not satisfied with their score results was because their score was not sufficient enough to fulfill the requirement. They need to try taking EPT another time to get a required score. One interesting answer stated that although she could get quite high score, she was satisfied with the result because she thought that she needed to keep learning English not only for the EPT but also for the other things like academic speaking and academic reading to support her further study (Respondent 20). Another respondent indicated that the respondent needed help from other people. She realized that by learning EPT in autodidact way, she still found some difficulties to understand the materials (Respondent 43). On the other hand, respondents who were satisfied with their scores stated that they were confident with their capability, and they had seen good improvement in their EPT score (Respondents 4, 17, 23, 28, 38).

- Generalizability

Generalizability is particularly important when understanding how self-efficacy estimates on one task generalize to other related tasks, such as academic domains. It refers to the degree to which self-efficacy beliefs are positively related, either within a behavioral domain, across behavioral domains or across time. The actual result of EPT of the respondents showed that more than a half of the respondents did not pass the required score (49 respondents: 64%), and the rest of the respondents passed their required score (36%). It can be estimated that respondents needed to improve their self-efficacy in order to perform their tasks successfully i.e. English Proficiency Test.

However, the duration in learning English did not give vital impact in the leveraging of students' self-efficacy in showing their capacity in doing English proficiency test.



Based on the pie chart, it can be known that 30% of the respondents had learnt English for more than 10 years; other 30% learnt English in 5 – 10 years. It means that more than 50%, exactly 60%, of the respondents had learnt English for more than 5 years. However, learning English for more than 5 years did not guarantee that respondents could perform high self-efficacy in doing English Proficiency Test. Long duration of learning English did not have correspondence on how well students showed their self-efficacy in performing their English Proficiency Test. Based on the data, more than a half of students had studied English for more than 5 years (60%), but 31.2% respondents stated that they were satisfied with the results of their English Proficiency Test.

According to the interview given to the respondents, they performed low level self-efficacy as a result of a change of a new way of learning. During the pandemic, preparation class of English Proficiency Test was conducted through online classes. It was different from what had been done in the previous years. The preparation class was aimed to help to escalate students' capacities as well as confidence in performing their English Proficiency Test, so they could obtain their expected scores. Online learning gave a significant difference in students' perception toward understanding particular materials. By having online learning, students were urged to learn more individually than the previous way of learning (Respondent 1, 3, 7, 10). Learning independently needed bigger effort due to students' limited time, low motivation, and inadequate facilities (Respondent 2, 3, 4, 9). Moreover, most of the students did not only study their master but also worked in any institutions. Of course students had to divide their time between study and work (Respondent 4, 8, 10). The other condition that made their learning process heavier was that the respondents were mothers who had to take care of their families. Other than studying and working, some of the respondents had to take care of their little children (Respondents 1, 6, 8, 9, 10). Thus, respondents had more challenge to perform their self-efficacy in showing their capabilities in doing English Proficiency Test.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the three aspects of self-efficacy, the generalizability showed that most respondents (50.6%) preferred to prepare their English Proficiency Test in autodidact way meaning that respondents learnt individually without the help from their teachers or friends. More than 50% respondents (74%) took English Proficiency Test for more than once to achieve their required score. High level of magnitude was presented since more than 50% respondents believed that they could complete their task without the help of other people. However, the duration in learning English did not give vital impact in the leveraging of students' self-efficacy in showing their capacity in doing English proficiency test. On the other hand, respondents performed low level self-efficacy as a result of a change of a new way of learning. During the pandemic, preparation class of English Proficiency Test was conducted through online classes.



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