THE COMMUNICATIVENESS OF ENGLISH TESTS AT VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract: Language testing and assessment play a crucial role in evaluating the school quality system and in regarding the progress of student's achievement. Since most classrooms in Indonesia consist of more than 30 to 40 students in a classroom, it is not an easy task to handle and to assess the educational success of students. It is very important to assess the achievement of the students. Further, teachers without standardized assessments will not understand the experience, skills, and abilities of the students in their classroom. The aim of this article is to examine the content of mid-term exams that were given to class 10 in the second semester of the 2019 – 2020 academic year. The objective of the article is to find out the content of the English test measured the communicative competence of students. There were five tests collected from five schools in different clusters of South Tangerang, Indonesia. The results of analysis showed that the tests were failed in measuring the student's communicative competence while language focus could be tested by them.

Keyword: *communicative approach; communicative language test; structural approach*

INTRODUCTION

According to the 1994 curriculum the communicative approach was established as an approach in teaching English. Communicative teaching is always adapted to students' language competence, which implies that students have internalized English grammar which gives them the basis for a language theory; a generative grammatical model that seeks to account for its linguistic competence.

English competence means that students understand the rules of the language used and the meaning of the words used. However, aside from the aspect of competence in language principles, there are still non-linguistic elements such as the context and situation that accompany language competence. Implementation of language competence along with non-language elements in the context of communication properly is called communication performance. Language competence and communication performance are the main objectives of language teaching. Furthermore, the effectiveness of student communication can be enhanced by a deep understanding of the non-linguistic elements that shape language competence in the performance of student communication interactions.

The communicative approach emphasizes the learning needs of students learning languages. Therefore, communicative

English teaching needs to consider the situation and conditions that can influence the teaching of English, namely:

1. The language environment in society
2. Student characteristics, and
3. The quality of the teaching teacher

These three aspects are very influential in the implementation of communicative English teaching. Teachers need to have sufficient knowledge to be able to do an analysis of student performance. They must be able to examine the effect of language in society on teaching English. They also must be able to do the linguistic study and characteristics of students as a whole and not just based on mistakes in communication performance.

Indeed, it is communicative competence that distinguishes this "new" approach from the previous approach which emphasizes structural competence in the language. This "new" teaching enables people to witness the communication performance more often. This is only possible if students are motivated to express their feelings, ideas, or emotions. Such learning atmosphere only appears when students feel safe and as an individual has value (Littlewood, 1984). The conducive learning atmosphere relies on the principles of psychology. Davis (1974), Brumfit (1983), as quoted by Madya (1991), put forward several principles as follows:

1. Teaching will produce results if the contents of an activity unit are related to the needs and experiences of students.
2. Teaching can occur if students are fully motivated.
3. Teaching will run smoothly if lessons and exercises about language elements are made meaningful because they can be useful in daily life
4. Students must be given ample opportunities to be able to actively participate in the learning process
5. Students must be helped to be able to observe and understand the relationship between elements of language, the communication situation, and culture through diagrams, graphs, and visualizations that are diverse and simple (easy to understand).
6. Activities in class must consider the fact that each individual has a different learning style and learning speed
7. Transfer of learning is not always automatic.

In addition to the principles of psychology, several educational principles are also established in communicative language teaching. The principles according to Finochiiarro and Brumfit are:

1. Because the transfer of learning is not always automatic, efforts must be made to instil potential abilities in students so that they are motivated to be able to generalize communicative expressions of the grammar or learning rules they learn, from one socio-cultural situation to another socio-cultural situation that is equal;
2. The spiral or cycle approach is highly recommended.
3. Starting point, the preparation of the curriculum to the learning unit should be in the form of communication and social language functions required by students
4. Spirai's approach is used in presenting the same language functions in different socio-cultural situations.

The results of communicative English teaching are also highly contained in the quality of the teaching teacher. How far have teachers been able to instill language functional skills from within their students? The functional proficiency will be seen from the three main competencies shown by students in communication, namely:

1. Participatory competence, namely the ability to provide adequate responses to tasks in class and to procedural rules.
2. Interactional competence, namely the ability to interact adequately with the social norms of discourse.
3. Academic competence is the ability to obtain new information, assimilate or understand new information, and form new concepts.

The teachers need to select which of the three types of competencies that he wants to achieve well. They must be observant, thorough, and careful in analysing it so that in there will be no difficulties in their teaching activities.

Broadly speaking, teaching is carried out through two stages, namely the stages of communicative and communicative activities. At the pre-communicative stage, the teacher equips students with knowledge and skills such as structure, language rules, vocabulary, and basic skills so that students are given the opportunity to practice them, first separately, after which all the skills they have already practiced.

In quasi communicative activities, students first practice communicating on their own using English. For example, the teachers convey information about themselves (name, places, the environment, the size of the family, etc.) and uses English to process information. For example, to understand the questions that have been asked, read instructions, and the similar activity. In the next stage, students are able to carry out various social activities that include various conditions and situations of conversation and discussion, dialogue, various simulations, role-playing. improvisation, debate, and so on. In developing students' oral communication, teachers need to consider two important aspects, namely:
1. Fill in the instructor, and
2. Types of exercises and activities that will be given to students.

The teaching content needs to meet the needs of students to play a role in various situations and conditions of communication. The teacher must be creative so that the various exercises and activities experienced by students are not boring. Communicative approach is the most appropriate approach to improve students' communication skills because it is complementing the shortcomings of the previous approach. The communicative approach also presents more

tangible results regarding the ability of students to apply their mastery of English in a variety of real situations.

Requirements of communicative language testing

A basic principle of communicative language testing is that the assignments made to reflect authentic activities which test-takers are to be hoped to face in the reality outside of the classroom. Brown (2005) has identified the five requirements of communicative language testing that set up what is to be called a communicative language test. The requirements can be known as meaningful communication, authentic situation, language input, creative language output, and integrated language skills.

1. **Meaningful communication.** It means that the test needs to be meaningful communication to students, and it should fit the student's personal necessity. It could be an offer and make the language become active which is beneficial for the students. The use of genuine activities can improve meaningful communication which will be gained by them.

2**. Authentic situation.** It means that communicative language test provides learners the chance to facer and the use of the target language by receptive or productive in original settings to indicate how powerful the student's language capability is.

3. **Unpredictable language input**. It means that the fact which is in reality usually unlikely happen to predict about what speakers will say. This is a native way of communication that should be reiterated in the communicative language testing one.

4. **Creative language output**. It means that the fact that happens in the real-world or reality language input is largely dependent on language input to prepare for someone's reply.

5. **Integrated language skills**. It means that a communicative language test is going to gain the students' usage of language

ability interactively, as can be seen in obvious communication.

The main objective of this article, therefore, is to examine the level of communicativeness of Final English tests by addressing the following research question: To what extent do the English tests measure the students' communicative competence in some vocational high schools?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The participants of this study were the Some Vocational High School in South Tangerang. They were from public and private schools. The setting of this study was divided into private schools and public schools especially in South Tangerang. Data were collected through questionnaires. This study used a qualitative method, particularly the descriptive qualitative method. It was appropriate to interpret and analyze the communicativeness of mid-term questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the Ministry of Education and Culture, there are three types of tests (Daily Test, Midterm Test, and Final Test). Daily Test is conducted once every sub material by the teacher and its material is based on the teacher. For the other two tests, a midterm test is conducted twice in every half of each semester.

The average for the subject is counted every semester based on the formulas below.

$$N = \frac{((\text{Tugas} \times 1) + (\text{UH} \times 2) + (\text{UTS} \times 3) + (\text{UAS} \times 4))}{10}$$

These formulas show that the Midterm test (UTS) and Final test (UAS) are more important than the Task and Daily exam (UH). More of the tests' detail and expertise are included. Besides being arranged more formally, they are assigned by the head curriculum principal, not the subject teachers.

Based on the reasons above, this article focuses on the analysis of only Mid-term test (UTS). Mid-term test (UTS) papers were from vocational schools in five separate clusters in the city of South Tangerang were randomly selected for the study. To look at what they have in common and how they vary from each other, the two forms of test documents will be presented separately. A comparison between their contents and the theories about communicative language testing will be made to see to what extent they can measure learners' communicative competence.

Test contents

In line with the Midterm test (UTS), all test papers questions tended to contain the material about grammar, structures, and vocabulary or can be said that the test papers are focusing on the "language focus". They were much focused on the reading section but just a little on the writing. The most general question forms in the research paper were the style of multiple-choice questions. The test paper's options were identical to each other to establish confusion as destruction. It contains real understanding for each answer to choose the right alternative. Here are some examples are taken from the non-similar test papers submitted.

1. His father .... a car yesterday.
   A. buy   B. buyed   C. bought   D. is buying
2. One of my classmates … a scholarship from Harvard University
   A. get   B. gets   C. got   D. is getting
3. Susi is a student. She is .... grade X, class X TKJ 1.
   A. in   B. on   C. at   D. of
4. Anto and I are playing guitar together … like music so much
   A. we   B. you   C. I   D. she
5. Who is .... ?
   A. this   B. those   C. these   D. that
6. How many siblings ....have?
   A. does   B. is   C. do   D. are

Figure 1. *Multiple choice item in the test*

Source: Midterm test (UTS) collected from three vocational school

Examples from this test show that they focus on grammar and structure, and on form rather than the implementation in particular. The reading portion is another common part of the exam. Reading is tested with no more than 80 words through short reading texts. There is then the Truth / False task or the Question and Answer task. The most famous among the five papers to discuss the comprehension of what they are reading by students are these two forms of reading assignments. In a True / False assignment, though, there is a 50% risk of being true, whether or not they actually understand the text. So often this form is not very reliable in assessing student achievement in their abilities to learn. Below is an example of a reading assignment on the test paper.

On Sunday, Johny gets up at 10 o'clock. Then he reads his newspaper in the kitchen. He has breakfast at 11.30 and then he telephones his mother in Scotland. In the afternoon, at 1.00, Johny plays tennis with his sister and after that, they eat dinner in a restaurant. At 6.00, Johny swims for one hour and then he goes by bike to his brother´s house. They talk and listen to music. Johny watches television in the evening and drinks a glass of Jack Daniel's whiskey. He goes to bed at 11.30.

Statements are True (T) or False (F).

Johny gets up at 10am on Sundays.

Johny reads the newspaper in the lounge.

His father lives in Scotland.

Figure 2. *Reading section*
Source: Midterm test (UTS) (SMK Pustek Serpong)

I have close friend, his name is Pranata, He was born in 2001, his weight is 75Kg, so he is very fat and his hair is black, short and kinky.

He goes to Science and Technology Center Vocational school, South Tangerang.He also diligent student His hobby is talking about otomotif machine, that's him.

What does Pranata do?

How old is Pranata?

Where does he go?

What is his hobby?

Figure 3. *Reading section*
Source: Midterm test (UTS) collected from three vocational school

In writing tests, out of five exam papers, there are three that require writing. However, in the form of 'rearranging phrases' or 'answering personal questions, writing assignments are often given. There is only one writing assignment that allows students to complete it by using their integrative skills. Specifically,' write the part using the word/phrase' provided. This type of assignment is illustrated below:

1. ....than it was yesterday.

   Budi got into library and ....

2. I am sorry that I didn't get her an anniversary present.

   I wish ....

Figure 4. *Writing section*
Source: Midterm test (UTS) (SMK Bina Informatika)

Smoking-is-no-this-restaurant-a

bought-I-yesterday-car-a.

Figure 5. *Writing section*
Source: Midterm test (UTS) (SMKN 2 Tangerang Selatan)

What is your hobby?

My hobby

....

How many siblings do you have?

I have

....

Figure 6. *Writing Section*
Source: Midterm test (UTS) (SMK RI)

Three examples above show that students don't have a lot of free writing assignments where they can feel free to express their own opinions about something is happening around them such as: Describing everyday activities of your own, describing your education, family, etc. This type of writing assignment is considered capable of evaluating the real accomplishments of students and encouraging their imagination through the use of the target language, which is not included in the exam.

And these types tend to test language knowledge separately. It's mean they only examine the meaning of vocabulary, grammar and spelling of words. However, this point testing only focusses for its own sake, understanding of formal linguistic structures and not the manner in which knowledge is used to achieve contact (McNamara, 2000). In some fields of language learning, it could help to assess student success, but not their communicative competence, which is the focus of language learning and the stated intent of textbooks.

In general, the contents of the midterm (UTS) and final exams could be said able to measure what are "presented in a textbook. That means they are consistent with the knowledge introduced in the textbook. But they mainly contain technical and theoretical tasks and tend to test memorizing students' language knowledge instead of their creative

application for communication. There are several tasks that focus on developing communication. Another weakness of the test paper is that a small number of choices in multiple choice assignments can lead to a high likelihood of choosing the correct answer at random. In addition, pronunciation, listening and speaking are not tested, although materials for seminars and 'regular training' programs suggest listening tasks should be included.

Comparison with theories about communicative language testing

It can be seen that the subject (family, school, society, etc and the form of assignment (multiple choice, right-wrong, acceptable, etc in the test are very common to students through example and test review. Furthermore, the vocabulary and circumstances used are familiar with real life and represent the expertise and subjects introduced in textbooks. In communicative language testing, the above issue is called 'concentrating on content' and 'bias to test concepts'.

Although theories regarding communicative language testing emphasize substantive communication in terms of tests, these tests are rather specific on type and precision. For students, they have a simple and familiar sense. However, to test the language awareness of students, they did not establish so-called 'unpredictable language input' and 'creative language production.' Furthermore, as promoted in communicative language research, these assessments appear to test discrete points of language competence rather than integrative points (Oller, 1976).

CONCLUSION

In short, this paper analyzed communicative language testing using its features and concepts. Some of test papers have been analyzed including mid-term test. By the result of analysis in this article, it showed that English language test do not merely

measure student's communicative competences in the language learning. Several concerns have been raised that need to be discussed by language test makers and teachers involved in testing procedures.

Language test designers and teachers must think about the specific types of tests to assess the language skills of students in order to produce more accurate tests.

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