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Learners' Attitude Toward the Implementation of Standardized Test of Academic English Proficiency Test

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1 ABSTRACT

English language competence plays an importance role for social and economic sectors. As one of required skill for the market demands, English test is often conducted to measure one's ability for both active and passive English language skills. Recent studies have found that the commonest international tests are considered unnecessary for non-native English countries' pedagogical background. Therefore, Standardized Test of Academic English Proficiency Test (STAcEP) is designed to fill the gaps between the need of English language assessment and Indonesian socio-educational curriculum. Some previous studies of STAcEP research has focused on the test validity and reliability. However, study of learners' attitude has not been conducted to evaluate to what extent the test is significantly correlated with their engagement with the test. This study aims to investigate learners' attitude towards the implementation of STAcEP test instrument. In order to report accurately learners' attitudes, a learners' attitude of test participation questionnaire is electronically distributed to 750 participants. Thus, the data are analyzed qualitatively and presented according to learners' attitude indicators towards: 1) test design; 2) test information transparency; 3) test procedures; 4) test mode; and 5) test wash back. The results revealed that various responds of the aforementioned indicators have been performed by the learners. Moreover, the finding of the study is expected to be a framework for STAcEP test preparation classes.

Keywords: learners' attitude, Standardized Test, English Proficiency Test

1. INTRODUCTION

Designing a suitable English language test in accordance with the needs of test takers for post-test occupation becomes a major concern for Indonesian universities. English test is considered pivotal to measure one's competence for both academic and professional employment context. When it is used for local practice, international English tests with English-native cultural background corpus is often relevant with the students' needs after taking the test. Therefore, Standardized Test of Academic English Proficiency (STAcEP) is designed to bridge the importance of conducting English test to evaluate students' English competence and the relevancy of Indonesian curriculum integrated in the test. STAcEP uses texts of Indonesian socio-economic, cultural, and historical background. Recently, this test has been implemented by several private Indonesian institutions to test students' English skills specifically in reading and listening competence.

Research on STAcEP has been conducted since it was firstly designed in 2017. Several previous research of STAcEP discussed about its material content component, students' learning schemes, test validity and reliability. Non-English department students have certain learning strategies and needs different from students of English study program [1]–[6]. A number of English language test assessment for non-native English country studies have

focused on language literacy proficiency for students [7]–[10], teachers' assessment knowledge [11]–[13], validity and reliability test instruments [14]–[18], language learning strategies [19], [20], and students' engagement in language learning process [13], [21]–[23]. While researches have studied language assessment topic in the view of aforementioned aspects, there is a little published data on the student's attitudes. A previous study of students' attitudes towards a language test implementation in China context has showed that students' attitudes contribute as a factor needed to consider in test development and validation [24]. There are five criteria concerned in this study: attitude to test design [20], attitude to test information transparency provided [25], attitude to test procedure [21], [24], attitude to test mode [1], [26], and attitude to test washback [27], [28].

Although a study has revealed students' attitudes factors and description towards an English test in Chinese context, no detailed investigation of this area has been conducted in Indonesian context particularly in STAcEP research project. The evaluation of how students perform their attitude towards the implementation of test will give a significant influence for STAcEP test preparation class and test material development in the future. Therefore, the recent study focuses on investigating how learners' attitude are towards STAcEP test instrument implementation as an English certification program in a private university in Indonesian context.

2. METHOD

This research is classified as a qualitative study since it focuses on describing qualitatively students' attitudes towards the implementation of STAcEP test as a required English certification program in Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo, Indonesia. The university aims to educate all the students to not only master their own discipline in their majors, but also has at least intermediate level of English passive skills, reading and listening. STAcEP English certification program, thus is developed to facilitate students an additional English program to train their English competence. The STAcEP English certification program in this research was done in April – August 2019. This period of STAcEP implementation program was the first-time debut after its research and development process in 2 years. After having a final test examination in August 2019, all learners were participated in filling the questionnaire as a part of university programs evaluation.

In order to report accurately learners' attitudes, a learner's attitudes in a test participation questionnaire is electronically distributed to 750 participants. Thus, the data are analyzed qualitatively and presented with regards to: 1) attitude to test design; 2) attitude to the transparency of test information; 3) attitude to test procedures; 4) attitude to test mode; and 5) attitude to test wash back. These five indicators are explained in 24 statements of open-ended questionnaire. These statements give five alternative opinions for the participants: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Moreover, the participants are able to give additional opinions in notes section in the questionnaire. Open-ended questionnaire form is created to provide research participants opportunity delivering their attitude in a more detailed description. The learners participated in the research were bachelor degree students of sixth semester from various study programs: engineering, health science, law, education, economic, social and political science faculties.

Table 1 List and raw result of open-ended questionnaire

No.	Statement	Responses (in percentage)				
		SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I think the design of the test is on the whole reasonable	22.2	46	20.6	4.8	6.3
2	I think STAcEP is a comprehensive test of my English proficiency	17.5	34.9	25.4	12.7	9.5
3	I believe STAcEP test score can really reflects my English level	17.7	38.7	17.7	19.4	6.5
4	I think the language abilities assessed in STAcEP are what I need for my studies and work	14.3	42.9	20.6	17.5	4.8
5	I think the test items in STAcEP reflect real-life language use	22.2	46	17.5	7.9	6.3
6	I can easily access STAcEP test information	28.6	44.4	15.9	7.9	3.2
7	I comprehend how STAcEP assesses my English language competence	17.5	42.9	15.9	15.9	7.9
8	I comprehend the scoring criteria for STAcEP listening test	28.6	36.5	17.5	7.9	28.6
9	I comprehend the scoring criteria for STAcEP reading test	20.6	46	19	11.1	3.2
10	I am familiar with the English certification program: STAcEP	25.4	38.1	23.8	4.8	7.9
11	The instructors have explained information about the test	20.6	39.7	7.9	20.6	20.6
12	I am satisfied with the organization of the test	23.8	41.3	17.5	11.1	6.3
13	I am satisfied with the examination room for STAcEP	17.5	44.4	19	14.3	4.8
14	I think the examiners have performed their duties well during the test	27	44.4	12.7	14.3	1.6
15	I can perform to the best of my ability in the STAcEP listening test	19	42.9	23.8	4.8	19
16	I can perform to the best of my ability in the STAcEP reading test	21	40.3	17.7	9.7	11.3
17	I believe the STAcEP listening test can well assess my English listening abilities.	20.6	42.9	20.6	14.3	1.6
18	I believe the STAcEP reading test can well assess my English reading abilities.	19	39.7	22.2	6.3	12.7
19	I have improved my English level through preparing and taking STAcEP test	31.7	36.5	15.9	11.1	4.8
20	I think STAcEP has motivated me to spend more time learning English	20.6	41.3	14.3	15.9	7.9
21	I think the STAcEP has motivated me to listen to more English radio programs	20.6	46	20.6	7.9	4.8
22	I think STAcEP has motivated me to read more English newspapers and magazines	23.8	38.1	15.9	14.3	7.9
23	I believe STAcEP has pushed me to study harder in English	20.6	46	15.9	15.9	1.6

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Open-ended questionnaire results of learners' attitudes towards the implementation of STAcEP test as a final examination of English certification program in Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo are described in five sections as the indicators: attitude to test design, attitude to the transparency of test information, attitude to test procedure, attitude to test mode, and attitude to test washback.

3.1. Attitude to Test Design

Statement 1 to statement 5 in the questionnaire represent students' attitude to test design. There are 46% participants agree that the design of the test is appropriate to measure their English passive skills. While 34.9% participants concur that STAcEP is a comprehensive test for their English proficiency level, 38.7% of all learners believe that the test score can truly reflect their English level. Although Learners answered very positively on the overall design of STAcEP with the two components of listening and reading,

in some notes related to the questions focused, 17 participants mentioned that STAcEP needs to develop learner's productive skills to test overall English skills accurately. This finding is in line with a study by Du (2012) that English skills need to be tested to test overall students' competence.

"I don't think it's enough for all my ability because there is no speaking and writing test" (1)

"I am familiar with the content, about Islamic and Indonesian topic texts" (2)

Other two statements in this indicator present how relevant the test is with the learners' real-life, academic and occupation context. It is approximately 42-46% participants show their agreement that STAcEP test they take is applicable to their needs in real-life context. These five findings in term of attitude to test design, of 34.9 to 46% participants have a positive attitude to the design of STAcEP test in reading and listening sections. In the future, STAcEP test is expected to develop a more comprehensive area in speaking and writing skill assessment.

3.2. Attitude to the Transparency of Test Information

Indicator of test information transparency attitude is described in statement 6 to statement 9. Of 750 participants, 44.4% show that it is easy to access information related to STAcEP program and know well the scoring criteria for STAcEP composition section. There are 42.9% participants also have the same agreement that they understand how STAcEP measures or assesses their English language abilities. Although 46% participants agree that they comprehend with the scoring criteria for reading test, only 36.5% participants understand the scoring criteria for STAcEP listening test. No additional notes given by the participants related to the attitudes they performed in the questionnaire. However, the answers given may be triggered from the explanation of STAcEP program from English Language Center of Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo in the beginning of sixth semester.

A comprehensive information was given to the coordinator of each study program in the campus and it was socialized in the students' academic preparation program conducted by the faculty. Considering the recent way how STAcEP is informed to the learners, updating STAcEP program and test information in university website is regarded more efficient and effective rather than centred-information from the study program. This idea is supported by the result of the study done by Mertsalova (2016) discussing about the transparency situation in educational context that will be beneficial not only for academic parties but also for the entire society.

3.3. Attitude to Test Procedures

Test procedure attitudes are represented in statement 10 to statement 14. Learners agree that the information of

STAcEP including the schedule and the procedures to take the test is clear. It can be summarized from the results of statement 11 that there are 38.1% participants agree that they are familiar with STAcEP English certification program. As stated in research methodology, STAcEP test in this research was its first implementation after 2-year research and development. In the next section, it is showed that 39.7% participants reported that their English instructors have provided the information clearly although there is little information about STAcEP in English Language Center's website. More than 40% participants concur that they feel satisfied with the organization of the test, the examination room for the test, and the examiners' responsibility during the test. There are two additional notes added from the participants that the facility of listening recording was good but it could be much better if they could use headphone for a better quality of listening. Another comment states that the students might not be familiar with the listening section because it was the first time having STAcEP test. Therefore, this factor might influence their listening score. Those two comments are stated as follow.

"The recording is clear but we just experience this for the first time, sorry if we have a bad score listening" (3)

"The speaker is good but I think ELC needs a new one for the best audio" (4)

"I felt rather confused at the first time because I am a transfer student. I have different procedure but then I understand the registration procedure for me" (5)

Test procedures are different for certain case of learners (transfer students and students who missed regular English certification program). It confirms the same result with Jinsong's study in Fundan University that different level of students has certain test procedures [24]. Based on overall finding description in statement 11 to 15, it can be concluded that learners mostly show their positive attitudes and supportive feedback towards the STAcEP test procedures.

3.4. Attitude to Test Mode

In the questionnaire, statement 15 to statement 19 address learners' attitudes to test mode. Test mode refers to the way how the test is delivered. While 42.9% participants believe that they can perform to the best their ability in STAcEP listening test, of 40.3% participants agree that they do the best of their competence in reading section. Moreover, the mode of STAcEP paper-based test is considered to assess participants' listening and reading ability, presented by approximately 39.7 to 42.9% participants. STAcEP test and class preparation are also believed by 36.5% participants who concur that their English competence level have improved since they joined STAcEP program. Although more than 36.5% learners agree and 31.7% participants strongly agree, a feedback comes from 11.1% those who disagree with STAcEP recent mode. Current technology should be used to design an online test mode for STAcEP. As comment section stated below, paper-based test is regarded ineffective and it may increase students' dishonest attitude tendency during the test.

"I think online form of test will be great and minimize cheating" (6)

The results of statements reflecting test mode criterion demonstrate that students perform a positive response to the mode of STAcEP test which is in a paper-based form. Online test mode feedback comes from student of Engineering Faculty. This reflects that a student's background discipline may impact on how student performs a certain attitude and learning strategies [1], [26].

3.5. Attitude to Test Washback

Test washback effect refers to learning attitude and behaviour after taking the test [27]. Learners' attitudes to test washback are revealed in statement 20 to 23. There are 41.3% test takers concur that STAcEP has motivated them to spend more time learning English while 46% other participants agree that listening more English radio programs become an after-effect of taking STAcEP test. No participant delivered more detailed information about test washback they have. However, the requirement from the university to pass the program with at least basic criterion for STAcEP score has more or less influence how the learners behave with this program. Motivation to read more English newspaper and magazines is performed by 38.1% participants. In the last statement, it is about 46% test takers believe and agree that the test has encouraged them to study harder in English. This result show that the learners already have stimulus to achieve better STAcEP score. Based on the result, material development and teaching strategy for test preparation class, therefore, should keep the students' motivation high. Thus, STAcEP program and test implementation positively gives a significant influence to the learners. This finding is in line with the theory of test washback that test washback potentially encourage learners to learn new learning strategies to succeed the test [28] and give particular effect to the test takers [27].

4. CONCLUSION

Designing a language test assessment needs of research and development in areas of institutional considerations, material test development, teacher's test knowledge, and learner's perspective. This theoretical and practical thought are essential for language assessment quality [29]–[31]. This paper figures out how learners attitudes contribute to the research and development of STAcEP in its first year of implementation. Overall findings reflect learners' positive attitudes and supportive feedback for STAcEP test evaluation in all attitude criteria. Specifically on attitude to test mode and test procedures, the result of the study is in contrast with study report by Fan (2014), that the learners correspond positively although there the test mode and room facility for test need to develop. This verifies that learners' different experience and background contribute to different attitude [32], [33].

The major limitation of this current study is that attitude contribution performed by the learners are subjectively presented according to their own perception and cannot be generalized in different setting and context. It can be assumed that regular evaluation of learners' attitudes is able to have more rigorous information. The findings of the study contribute to STAcEP test evaluation for future implementation and it can be a framework for STAcEP material test preparation. The present study raises the possibility for research on developing test material on productive skills and measuring its construct validity to test more comprehensive English skills for non-native English speakers in EFL tertiary context.

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