



Time to be free from TOEFL ITP regime: The urgency of developing localized English testing based on ASEAN norms

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Abstract. Since 2016, Brawijaya University has decided the TOEFL ITP a graduation requirement for undergraduate students. Meanwhile, several other state-owned universities have developed their own tests to assess their students' English proficiency. Therefore, it is quite important for UB to develop its own English assessment system. Designing local English language tests is crucial in recognizing the diversity of English usage in global contexts, particularly within the ASEAN region. In the ASEAN context, English serves as a lingua franca, facilitating communication among speakers from different countries. However, the current English language testing systems often do not account for this diversity, leading to biased evaluations that may disadvantage non-native speakers. Meanwhile, developing local tests through research and development (R&D) processes ensures that assessments are more culturally and contextually relevant. Ultimately, locally designed English language tests contribute to a more inclusive understanding of language proficiency, promoting linguistic justice in a globalized world. The purpose of this article is to explore the significance of developing English language tests tailored to the unique linguistic and cultural contexts of the ASEAN region.

Keywords: World Englishes, R&D, ASEAN context, localized, testing, online

1. Introduction

In recent years, the number of international English test-takers has surged, predominantly from non-native English-speaking countries. This increase has raised concerns about whether tests like IELTS and TOEFL are truly representative of the diverse Englishes used globally, particularly in higher education contexts. The images of NNEs, such as East and South Asians, are placed prominently on the homepages to engage visitors and highlight the tests' relevance to non-native speakers. The decision between IELTS and TOEFL iBT for English language learners is influenced by various factors, as revealed in the studies presented. Marketing and advertising by organizations like IDP and the British Council significantly affect the choice, with a large portion of test-takers swayed by these efforts. The format of the exam, whether paper-based or computer-based, also plays a

crucial role, with a substantial number of students preferring the format they are more comfortable with, which in turn influences their test choice (Boonsuk & Karakaş, 2020; Umirov, 2024). So that the choice of English language tests is heavily influenced by marketing, format preference, and the increasing demand for tests that reflect the global diversity of English use.

On the other hand, the globalization of English has led to diverse communities of learners, varied cultural and educational contexts, and the widespread use of English in multiple domains, creating significant challenges for language assessment in Global Englishes. Traditional approaches, especially in standardized tests like IELTS and TOEFL, have been criticized for focusing on linguistic accuracy over pragmatic effectiveness, prioritizing native-speaker norms (especially American and British English), and neglecting the real-life communicative needs of non-native speakers. These approaches often force diverse English varieties into a single scale of proficiency, which is increasingly seen as inappropriate and unfair (Olaleye, 2024). As a result, there is a growing call for more inclusive and context-sensitive assessment methods that recognize and value the rich variety of Englishes spoken around the world, reflecting the true communicative competence of global learners.

Meanwhile, the spread of English model of World Englishes, which categorizes English into three concentric circles: the Inner Circle (native English-speaking countries), the Outer Circle (countries where English is a second language), and the Expanding Circle (countries where English is a foreign language). It also addresses the shortcomings of current proficiency testing, which often emphasizes native-speaker norms, and calls for testing frameworks that better reflect the linguistic realities of English learners today. Therefore, adopting a pluricentric approach in proficiency testing is crucial for acknowledging the diverse and dynamic use of English globally, ensuring that assessments are more equitable and reflective of the real-world linguistic landscape. A more inclusive approach to English language testing, which recognizes the legitimacy of World Englishes, is essential for accurately assessing learners' communicative competence in a globalized world. It has been argued that standardized English language tests are typically designed based on native speaker norms, which do not reflect the linguistic diversity of English as it is spoken globally. By acknowledging the legitimacy of World Englishes, tests could better assess a learner's actual communicative competence in a globalized world. This would better align language assessment with the realities of English as a global lingua franca, ensuring fairness and equity for all test-takers (Ojha, 2022; Mouchid, et. al., 2023). Thus, embracing a pluricentric approach in English language testing is essential for fair and accurate assessment, aligning with the global realities of English as a lingua franca.

Zhang (2022) examines the influence of World Englishes on local standardized language proficiency tests, specifically focusing on the College English Test (CET) in China. It discusses the dominance of native English norms in language testing and how this impacts the design and scoring of tests like the CET. The study highlights the need to consider the diversity of English usage globally, as non-native speakers in the Expanding Circle, such

as China, increasingly use English in local contexts. The paper suggests that incorporating elements of World Englishes into the CET could better reflect the actual language proficiency of Chinese test-takers. The study examines how the College English Test (CET) in China, a local standardized language proficiency test, has incorporated elements of the World Englishes (WEs) paradigm while still relying on Inner Circle norms. Despite its traditional focus on native speaker standards, the CET has begun to include global and local topics and accents, emphasizing communicative competence over formal accuracy. There is a shift from a monocentric view of English, which sees it as a single, uniform language, to a pluricentric view that recognizes and values the linguistic diversity of English. This change reflects the modern sociolinguistic reality, where non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers, and the English language is used in diverse contexts worldwide (Zhang, 2022). Ultimately, incorporating World Englishes into standardized tests like the CET could provide a more accurate reflection of the actual language proficiency of non-native speakers in diverse contexts.

This article argues for the development of a localized English language testing system at Brawijaya University that aligns with ASEAN linguistic norms, emphasizing the need for culturally relevant assessments that reflect the diversity of English as a lingua franca in Southeast Asia, thereby fostering a more equitable and inclusive measure of language proficiency.

Since this article is a library research, the methodology for this study employs a qualitative, document-based approach to analyze existing literature on English language testing within the ASEAN context. The literature selection process was guided by specific criteria, including relevance to English testing, ASEAN language norms, and challenges related to localized testing standards. Relevant databases were consulted using targeted keyword strategies, focusing on studies that address non-native speaker perspectives and the need for regional adaptation in language assessments. A thematic analysis was applied, allowing for the identification of key themes such as “localization needs in ASEAN”. To ensure comprehensive and balanced insights, the study incorporates cross-referencing techniques that blend empirical studies with theoretical discussions, reinforcing the reliability and validity of the findings.

2. Literature Review

2.1. English in the Context of ASEAN

In ASEAN, English serves as the official language for all meetings and documents, and it is increasingly used in higher education institutions where courses are offered in English. Similar to the Bologna Process in Europe, ASEAN is moving towards harmonizing university degrees to enhance student and staff mobility and credit transfer. Even countries without an English heritage exhibit features similar to those in English-speaking ASEAN

nations due to linguistic similarities and contact. There is a need for ASEAN students to study English to improve their job prospects. The language proficiency defines "career English," which proposes a syllabus focused on workplace communication, and stresses the importance of effective teaching methods in ESL for developing the four key language skills (Mbuh, 2015; Hashim, Kaur, & Kuang, 2016). Consequently, as ASEAN countries strive to integrate and standardize higher education and professional standards, enhancing English language proficiency through targeted "career English" programs becomes crucial for equipping students with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly globalized job market.

English functions as a lingua franca in ASEAN. It facilitates communication among member states with diverse linguistic backgrounds. However, the variety of English spoken in the region often reflects local languages and cultures (Kirkpatrick, 2010). English is essential in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), serving as the official language for communication and a key requirement for professionals. The growing importance of English is reflected in improved proficiency levels, as indicated by the English Proficiency Index data from 2022 and 2023. While English facilitates regional and global communication, it complements rather than replaces the use of local languages, acting as a bridge for exchanging knowledge and expertise across borders (Zainuddin, 2023). While English serves as a crucial bridge for regional and global interactions within ASEAN, it enhances rather than overshadows the rich linguistic diversity of the region, supporting both the exchange of knowledge and the preservation of local languages and cultures.

Learning English in ASEAN has significantly improved communication skills among non-native speakers, fostering more mature and effective conversations within social institutions and organizations. Studies reveal that non-native speakers who learn English engage in more sophisticated discussions compared to those who lack foreign language experience. Mastery of English enhances participation in community activities and facilitates interactions with native speakers, promoting diversity and improving self-esteem. As English becomes an integral part of communication in ASEAN, it bridges gaps between non-native speakers and native populations, supporting personal and social development (Hieu & Thuy, 2022). As English increasingly becomes a central component of communication in ASEAN, it not only bridges gaps between non-native speakers and native populations but also fosters personal and social development by enhancing engagement, promoting diversity, and boosting self-esteem among individuals.

The ASEAN plus three regions, South Korea, Japan, and China, known for its rich linguistic and cultural diversity, has seen English become a key administrative language within ASEAN. This issue explores strategies and opportunities for balancing English language education with the preservation of local languages, addressing the complex interplay between global and local linguistic needs (Zein & Stroupe, 2017). In summary, English in ASEAN serves as a crucial tool for regional integration and global communication, while still complementing and respecting the use of local languages.

2.2. Online Language Assessment

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the challenges and potential of online education and assessment, highlighting the need for improved policies and practices to address issues like academic dishonesty and enhance student engagement. The pandemic led to significant disruptions in education globally, affecting 1.2 billion students across 144 countries. Despite these efforts, online testing and assessment faced several challenges. Globally, online education has raised concerns about academic dishonesty, as instructors struggle to verify student identities and manage cheating. Online language assessment offers benefits like promoting learner autonomy, evaluating student progress, and providing convenience through rapid feedback. Tools like e-portfolios and collaborative writing platforms enhance student engagement and assessment. There is a need for more comprehensive policies and training programs to improve online assessment practices (Rovai, 2000; UNESCO, 2020; Bu, 2022). Overall, while online language assessment offers significant benefits, it also presents challenges that require robust policies and training to ensure integrity and engagement in the digital learning environment.

There is a paradigm shift towards digital-first learning and assessment systems (LAS) driven by theoretical and technological advancements. This shift is crucial for achieving democratic and equitable educational opportunities. The framework integrates multiple theoretical and technological elements to provide a comprehensive system designed to offer personalized, secure, and effective learning and assessment experiences. The digital-first LAS model emphasizes transparency, privacy, fairness, and accessibility, essential for gaining widespread acceptance and trust from educators and stakeholders. The Duolingo English Test is an example of effective use of digital-first LAS technologies, providing accessible learning opportunities and validating learning through embedded personalized assessment and feedback. These examples illustrate how the theoretical and technological integration within the digital-first LAS ecosystem can support the development of effective, equitable, and secure learning and assessment systems (Langenfeld, Burstein & Davier, 2022).

2.3. English Language Testing in Indonesian Higher Education Context

In Indonesian higher education, proficiency in English is becoming a critical factor for students' academic success. Many universities require students to take English proficiency tests such as the TOEFL ITP or TOEIC as part of their admissions process or for placement in English language courses. For example, students entering English-language programs or international studies may need to meet certain TOEFL ITP or TOEIC score requirements to be admitted. These tests help universities evaluate whether students have the language skills necessary to succeed in courses that may be conducted in English or involve English textbooks and materials.

Both TOEFL ITP and TOEIC are recognized internationally, giving Indonesian students a globally accepted certification of their English proficiency. This enhances their academic mobility, allowing them to apply for scholarships, internships, or degree programs abroad. For students who plan to study overseas or enter multinational work environments, these tests provide an internationally recognized benchmark for their language skills.

The use of international English tests such as TOEFL ITP and TOEIC in Indonesian higher education plays a crucial role in preparing students for global academic and professional environments. These tests offer students an internationally recognized certification of their English proficiency, opening doors for further education and career opportunities. However, the financial costs and potential overemphasis on testing present challenges that need to be addressed to ensure equitable access and a more holistic language education. As Indonesia continues to globalize, the strategic integration of TOEFL ITP and TOEIC into the higher education system can be an important asset in developing a competitive, English-proficient workforce.

However, several state-owned universities do not use international language testing such as TOEFL, TOEIC, or IELTS as their students' English proficiency assessment. Otherwise, they develop their own localized English language testing. Several universities in Indonesia, including Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Gadjah Mada University (UGM), Airlangga University (Unair), Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology (ITS), University of Indonesia (UI), and Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), require English proficiency tests as part of their academic and administrative processes. These tests, such as ITB's ELPT, UGM's AcEPT, and UI's EPT, serve as entry requirements for graduate programs, graduation prerequisites, and criteria for lecturer certification. The consistent use of English proficiency assessments across these institutions highlights the importance of English language skills in higher education and professional advancement in Indonesia.

Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB)

This university uses the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) as a graduation requirement for ITB postgraduate programs, as well as for applying to master's and doctoral programs at ITB, registering for university, and as a requirement for applying to some national companies. The ITB ELPT has also been officially recognized as one of the English proficiency tests that can be used to fulfill the requirements for lecturer certification (<https://psdm.itb.ac.id/informasi-test-elpt/>).

Gadjah Mada University (UGM)

UGM uses the Academic English Proficiency Test (AcEPT) as a requirement for the admission of new students at the master's and doctoral levels, graduation requirements for undergraduate to doctoral students (S1-S3), and lecturer certification across Indonesia,

based on a decree from Ristekdikti, letter number 220/02.1/KP/2018. (<https://pusatbahasa.ugm.ac.id/test/>)

Airlangga University (Unair)

This university uses the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) as an administrative requirement for entrance exams and general graduation requirements at Airlangga University. (<https://pusatbahasa.unair.ac.id/en/unairs-elpt-english-language-proficiency-test/>)

Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology (ITS) Surabaya

ITS uses the EFL Test (English as a Foreign Language Test) as a prerequisite for student graduation (<https://bahasa.its.ac.id/index.php?bhs=1>).

University of Indonesia (UI)

UI uses the UI's English Proficiency Test (EPT), which is a predictive English proficiency test, as one of the administrative requirements for entrance exams to the University of Indonesia. It is also accepted by several other universities. In addition, the EPT is one of the requirements for lecturer certification (<https://lbifib.ui.ac.id/id/language-test/ui-ept-online>).

Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB)

The IPB EPT (English Proficiency Test) is a series of tests to assess English proficiency based on IPB University's standards. The IPB EPT can be used as one of the administrative requirements for entrance exams and the placement test for new IPB students. It can also be used as a graduation requirement and as one of the requirements for promotion within IPB University (<https://ila.ipbtraining.com/tes-ept-ipb/>).

2.4. Establishing Criteria for Developing Online English Assessment

Developing an effective online English proficiency test is a complex task that requires a multidisciplinary approach. Such a test must accurately measure students' language abilities while being user-friendly and accessible. To achieve this, it is crucial to involve three key experts in the design process: an English language expert, an educational media expert, and an IT expert.

The primary responsibility of the is to ensure that the test accurately measures the language skills. This expert must have knowledge about language pedagogy, assessment frameworks, and proficiency levels such as those defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The English language expert designs the

content of the test, ensuring that it is valid, reliable, and aligned with international standards.

The test items especially multiple-choice questions, reading passages must be crafted to reflect real-world language use. Without the guidance of an English language expert, the test might fail to measure essential linguistic abilities, leading to inaccurate assessments of students' proficiency. Furthermore, the language expert ensures that the test is sensitive to various English dialects and registers, making it inclusive for diverse learners.

For English language expert, to evaluate the suitability of a reading test within the socio-cultural context of ASEAN, several specific aspects need to be considered to ensure that the test material is relevant, inclusive, and sensitive to the region's cultural diversity. The following points should be assessed:

In designing English language tests for the ASEAN context, ensuring cultural relevance is essential. The texts used in the test should reflect the socio-cultural environment of ASEAN nations. This includes incorporating topics, situations, and stories that are familiar and meaningful to students from various ASEAN countries. Additionally, the texts should represent the diverse cultures of the region, showcasing customs, social values, and daily practices unique to ASEAN. Importantly, the test must avoid cultural biases by excluding content that may be irrelevant or unfamiliar to the test-takers, ensuring fairness for students across the region.

In terms of cultural sensitivity, it is important that the content respects the cultural norms, customs, and values of ASEAN countries. The texts should be inclusive and avoid any content that might offend specific cultural groups within the region. This promotes a respectful and sensitive approach to testing.

Topical relevance is another key factor in test design. The texts should address regional issues and events relevant to ASEAN, such as regional cooperation, environmental challenges, education, and ASEAN history and culture. By covering current and important issues within the region, the test content becomes more meaningful and engaging for students.

Promoting multicultural awareness is equally important. The texts should help students understand and appreciate the cultural diversity of ASEAN by presenting stories or articles involving different cultures from the region. Intercultural themes, such as migration, language, and cultural identity, should be explored, reflecting the realities of life in ASEAN.

Representation and inclusivity must be prioritized in narrative or story-based texts. Characters and perspectives should reflect the ethnic, cultural, and social diversity of ASEAN, providing fair and balanced representation. The texts should avoid stereotypes and offer a broad view of the region's many cultural groups, ensuring students feel seen and respected.

The educational media expert plays a vital role in ensuring that the online test is engaging, interactive, and pedagogically sound. This expert specializes in creating multimedia content that facilitates learning and assessment. In collaboration with the

language expert, the educational media expert designs visual and auditory materials, such as audio clips for listening sections or interactive reading texts.

The IT expert is responsible for the technical aspects of delivering the online test. This includes ensuring the platform's reliability, security, and scalability. The IT expert must create a system that supports user interaction, from logging in to submitting answers. Additionally, the test platform must be adaptable to different devices, including smartphones, tablets, and computers, to accommodate a wide range of test-takers.

In collaboration with the educational media expert, the IT expert ensures that multimedia content loads efficiently, does not cause glitches, and provides an uninterrupted test experience. The IT expert also guarantees that the test platform is secure and protects students' data and results from unauthorized access. Furthermore, they are responsible for integrating automated scoring systems, particularly for sections like reading and listening, where results can be generated instantly, providing quick feedback to students.

Collaboration among these three experts is essential because the design of an online English proficiency test is not a linear process. Each expert brings unique skills and perspectives that, when combined, result in a comprehensive and well-rounded test. The language expert provides the content knowledge, the media expert ensures effective delivery, and the IT expert creates the technological infrastructure that allows the test to function smoothly. For example, when designing a listening comprehension section, the English language expert selects appropriate audio materials, while the educational media expert determines the most effective way to present these materials to students. The IT expert then ensures that the audio files are seamlessly integrated into the platform without lag or technical difficulties. Without collaboration, these components could become disjointed, leading to a poor test experience and inaccurate results.

2.5. R & D Process in Developing Online English Assessment

To develop an online language test using the Borg and Gall (2007) R&D model, the process begins with research and information collection. In this phase, existing language tests, particularly those focusing on listening and reading, are reviewed to assess their strengths and weaknesses. A needs assessment is conducted through surveys or interviews with college students and language teachers to identify the skills to be tested, preferred task types, and challenges faced with current tests. Additionally, a literature review is carried out to gather insights on best practices for online language testing, assessment frameworks, and item creation for listening and reading tests.

Next, during the planning stage, objectives for the test are defined, specifying which skills will be assessed, such as listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and grammar in reading. A test blueprint is created, outlining content areas, question types, the scoring system, and the test's duration and difficulty levels. Technical aspects are also planned, including the selection of a platform for test delivery, ensuring device

compatibility, and establishing security measures. Additionally, an evaluation plan is devised to assess the test's effectiveness in measuring language proficiency.

Following the planning phase, preliminary product development takes place. Test items for listening and reading are created, encompassing various question types such as multiple-choice, short answer, and comprehension tasks. A prototype of the test is designed, incorporating features like time limits, question navigation, and automated scoring. Clear instructions are drafted to guide students in completing the test.

In the preliminary field testing phase, a small-scale trial of the test is administered to a group of students similar to the target population. Feedback is collected through surveys or interviews to gauge the clarity of instructions, question difficulty, test navigation, and user experience. Data on test completion times and student interactions with the platform are also gathered.

Based on the feedback from the preliminary field test, the main product revision is conducted. Revisions to the test items are made, difficulty levels are adjusted, and any technical issues are addressed. The scoring system is refined to ensure it accurately reflects students' proficiency.

The next phase, main field testing, involves administering the revised test to a larger and more diverse group of students. Comprehensive evaluations are conducted, including item analysis to identify effective questions and those needing further revision. The test's reliability and validity are measured across different contexts and user groups. Continued feedback on usability, especially from students using different devices, is gathered.

During the operational product revision phase, final adjustments are made to the test items, format, and user interface based on data from the larger trial. Any weaknesses are addressed to ensure the test is reliable, valid, and user-friendly. Security measures are finalized to prevent cheating and ensure secure test administration.

Once these refinements are complete, the final product is prepared. The fully functional online language test is finalized, and all supporting materials, such as guides for students and scoring rubrics, are prepared. The test is uploaded to the selected platform, optimized for various devices, and made ready for launch.

The final phase is dissemination and implementation. The test is made available to the target group of students, with instructions on how to access and complete it. Training or resources may be provided to instructors on how to administer the test and interpret results. Initial implementation is monitored to ensure smooth operation and to address any technical issues that may arise during the first rounds of testing.

The Borg and Gall R&D model is particularly well-suited for developing online language tests due to its structured, iterative approach that emphasizes both thorough planning and real-world testing. Language testing, especially in an online format, requires careful calibration to ensure reliability, validity, and user-friendliness across diverse learner populations and technological environments. The model's focus on preliminary field testing followed by product revision ensures that any issues related to content difficulty, interface design, or technical performance are identified and addressed early. Additionally,

the main field testing stage allows for broader validation across varied contexts, ensuring that the test functions effectively for different users and settings. This systematic cycle of testing, revising, and validating ensures the final product is not only pedagogically sound but also practical and accessible, making the Borg and Gall model an ideal framework for online language test development. By following these steps, the online language test can be systematically developed, tested, and refined before its official launch, ensuring it meets the required standards of quality and effectiveness.

3. Conclusion and Recommendation

3.1. Conclusion

The paper highlights the urgent need for localized English proficiency tests in the ASEAN context, moving away from reliance on traditional standardized tests like TOEFL and IELTS. These international tests often prioritize native-speaker norms, which do not reflect the linguistic diversity of English as used by non-native speakers in ASEAN countries. As English increasingly serves as a lingua franca in this region, it is essential to design assessments that are culturally and contextually relevant. A localized test would better assess real-world communicative competence, recognizing World Englishes and offering a more equitable evaluation for students across ASEAN nations.

3.2. Recommendation

Brawijaya University, along with other higher education institutions in Indonesia, should prioritize developing its own English proficiency assessment system based on ASEAN linguistic norms. This can be achieved through a research and development (R&D) process, ensuring that the test is tailored to the region's unique cultural and linguistic landscape. Collaborating with language experts, educational media specialists, and IT professionals will be crucial in creating a reliable, valid, and user-friendly test that reflects the diverse use of English within ASEAN. Additionally, it is recommended that institutions provide training for educators to effectively implement and interpret the localized tests, fostering a more inclusive approach to language assessment.

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