An Assessment of English Language Learning Proficiency of Students in Tertiary Level by Using English Ability Test

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Abstract— **The purposes of this research were 1) to develop English language ability test of College of General Education and Languages 2) to find out reliability and validity of the test and 3) to study the ability in English learning of the students in each faculty according to 5 skills; listening, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar.**

The subjects were 150 undergraduate students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, during 2012 academic year which derived through simple random sampling technique.

The results of the study were as follows:
1. The test showed content validity with index of correspondence values between the tests, scoring criteria, and expected learning outcome, of 0.70 to 1.00, which passed the set criteria.
2. The students' mean scores were 34.46 (out of 60) according to language skills. The highest rank was vocabulary ($\bar{x}$ =8.49 out of 12). The lowest rank was listening ($\bar{x}$ =7.06 out of 12).
3. The students' mean scores were 34.46 (out of 60) according to faculties. The highest mean scores were 34.76 from the students of Faculty of Business Administration, 34.46 from the students of Faculty of Information Technology, and 34.18 from the students of Faculty of Engineering respectively.

Keywords— **English Language Proficiency, English Language Ability Test**

I. INTRODUCTION

A lot of tests can be classified as language tests, ranging from exams at school (e.g. vocabulary tests, grammar tests etc.) or university to certificates aiming to provide the holder with some sort of standardised qualification [1].

In general, there are two kinds of tests: proficiency tests assess the amount to which the testee has reached 'proficiency', a certain predefined level, while achievement tests usually follow the principle of test as you teach [2].

The concepts of reliability and validity are some of the statistical intricacies involved. Apart from discussing the various aspects of validity, their linkage to the notion of washback and impact, and the ways in which validity is linked to reliability; it will touch on the issue of reliability itself [3].

Tests and practices, which were used during teaching-learning process included pretest, posttest, unit tests and exercises, were passed quality test before using. This is because these tests are used as instrument to assess student's learning and check whether the results follow the objectives or not. Therefore, if the tests are not qualified, the students' lessons will not be qualified as well [4]. On the other hand, if the tests are qualified, it causes qualified lessons. Moreover, it is significant especially in the development of English teaching lessons in research to compare various kinds of teaching-learning processes such as comparing effectiveness of learning during teaching or comparing teaching by using different skills with traditional method. Theses research require a qualified test which pass standard set to convey accurate results to check whether the results are followed by the objectives or not [5].

As College of General Education and Languages has arranged language teaching for five years without developing and analyzing effectiveness of language ability test for the first year students as well as creating a need survey in English learning of the first year students, a research, therefore, would like to study effectiveness of the tests and the students' competency in each faculty to adapt research results as a guideline for developing teaching-learning process and ability test in English in the future.

Research purposes:
1) to develop English language ability test of College of General Education and Languages
2) to find out reliability and validity of the test and
3) to study the ability in English learning of the students in each faculty according to 5 skills; listening, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

The data was gathered and analyzed as follows:

1. Population and sampling

    1.1 The population is undergraduate students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Bangkok, in first semester of 2012 academic year. There were 920 students from 3 faculties which are Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Information Technology and Faculty of Engineering.

    1.2 The sample consisted of 150 students, and was derived from a simple random sampling technique.

2. Variables

Variables in this study were as follows:

    2.1 The English learning ability of undergraduate students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

    2.2 Validity and reliability of English learning ability test.

3. Research Instruments

    3.1 A 2-hour English learning ability test (60 items: 60 scores) which consists of 5 skills as follows:

    12 items for listening skill

    12 items for reading skill

    12 items for writing skill

    12 items for vocabulary

    12 items for grammar

4. Construction and Development of Research Instruments

    The researcher constructed the English learning ability test in the following way:

English learning ability test

    Students were given English learning ability tests. The test consisted of 60 items (60 scores). The duration of the test was 60 minutes.

    First, the researcher studied the objectives of English language teaching, and focused on English reading, listening, writing, grammar, and vocabulary skills and strategies. Emphasis was placed on learning for main ideas, learning for topic sentences, learning for pronoun references, learning for facts and opinions, learning for author's purposes, learning for inference.

    Moreover, the researcher used the textbook, journal articles and related research as an outline to create the test. The researcher also, created a table of test specifications including language learning skills and goals for each items, and then created one set of English learning ability test.

Data Collection

    Data collection of this study was illustrated as following steps:

    1. Preparing TNI English ability test for all students, and arranging the test by all English teachers of College of General Education and Languages.

    2. Informing the students about the test objectives and the ways to answer the test.

    3. Trialling the test with samplings

    4. Comparing the students' ability of English five skills based on the students' faculty.

III. RESULTS

Part1: Results of Quality Check

    The test was examined with 150 sampling students to find out quality of TNI ability test by considering the test difficulty, discrimination, construct validity and test reliability. Results were as follows:

1. Fundamental statistics from the focus group were shown in the following table

Table 1 fundamental statistics of English learning ability test in five parts

TEST	n	k	Full scores	Mean	S.D.
Part 1 Listening	150	12	12	7.06	2.58
Part 2 Reading	150	12	12	7.55	2.33
Part 3 Writing	150	12	12	8.33	3.17
Part 4 Vocabulary	150	12	12	8.49	4.49
Part 5 Grammar	150	12	12	7.37	3.35
Total	**150**	**60**	**60**	**34.46**	**5.41**

    According to Table 1, it was demonstrated that the mean score and S.D. of English learning ability test were 34.46 and 5.41 respectively. When considering in each part, the highest mean score was vocabulary (8.49). Listening, however, was shown as the lowest part of mean score (7.06).

2. Construct Validity

    Construct Validity was checked for relation between scores in each item and scores for a whole test by using Pearson's product –moment correlation coefficient as the following table:

Table 2 Construct validity of the test calculated by using Pearson's product –moment correlation coefficient

item	r xy
1	.71**
2	.55**
3	.61**
4	.78**
5	.58**
6	.66**
7	.55**
8	.71**
9	.61**
10	.61**
11	.75**
12	.81**
13	.70**
14	.60**
15	.73**
16	.71**
17	.80**
18	.78**
19	.62**
20	.72**
21	.77**
22	.77**
23	.78**
24	.79**
25	.77**
26	.70**
27	.75**
28	.75**
29	.63**
30	.77**

31	.75**
32	.76**
33	.62**
34	.65**
35	.71**
36	.64**
37	.75**
38	.66**
39	.79**
40	.66**
41	.65**
42	.75**
43	.71**
44	.61**
45	.61**
46	.75**
47	.83**
48	.70**
49	.77**
50	.75**
51	.76**
52	.77**
53	.78**
54	.79**
55	.77**
56	.70**
57	.75**
58	.75**
59	.63**
60	.70**

*** Statistically significant relation at .01*

The test was checked for relation between scores in each item and scores for a whole test by using Pearson's product –moment correlation coefficient. The result showed that scores in each item and scores for a whole test of TNI English ability test had statically significant relation at 0.01, and moment correlation coefficient from .55 to .83. This indicated that the test construct was validity.

3. Test Reliability
The results of the test with focus group were shown in following able

Table 3 Reliability of English learning ability test

TEST	α	S.Emeas
Part 1 Listening	0.84	0.74
Part 2 Reading	0.86	0.82
Part 3 Writing	0.88	0.86
Part 4 Vocabulary	0.89	0.80
Part 5 Grammar	0.90	0.89
Total Reliability	**0.87**	**0.82**

According to Table 3, reliability of listening, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar of English learning ability test were 0.84, 0.86, 0.88, 0.89 and 0.90 respectively. In additions, total set of reliability was 0.87, and the standard error of the estimate was between 0.74-0.89.

Part 2: Results of Learning Ability of Students divided by five skills- listening, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar

Table 4 fundamental statistics of TNI English ability test in 5 parts and total

TEST	n	k	Full scores	Mean	S.D.
Part 1 Listening	150	12	12	7.06	2.58
Part 2 Reading	150	12	12	7.55	2.33
Part 3 Writing	150	12	12	8.33	3.17
Part 4 Vocabulary	150	12	12	8.49	4.49
Part 5 Grammar	150	12	12	7.37	3.35
Total	**150**	**60**	**60**	**34.46**	**5.41**

According to Table 4, it was shown that mean score of the students was 34.46. When considering in each part, the highest part was vocabulary ($\bar{x}$ = 8.49), and the lowest part was listening as $\bar{x}$ = 7.06 out of 12.

Table 5 mean scores of English learning ability divided by faculty

FACULTY	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S. D.
Engineering	50	25	46	34.18	4.85
Information Technology	50	20	46	34.46	5.73
Business Administration	50	22	44	34.76	5.70
Total	**150**	**20**	**46**	**34.46**	**5.41**

According to Table 5, the students' mean scores were 34.46 out of 60 from Business Administration students, followed by Information Technology students and Engineering students as 34.76 and 34.18 respectively.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

According to research analysis, the results were as follows:

Part 1 Analysis of English learning ability test quality

.1Test Quality
  1.1 Content Validity
The test was approved by three language experts and two test assessment experts. The scores, then, was calculated to find out IOC which was between 0.70-1.00. This meant that the test content was validity.
  1.2 Construct Validity
The test was checked for relation between scores in each item and scores for a whole test by using Pearson's product – moment correlation coefficient. The result showed that scores in each item and scores for a whole test of TNI English ability test had statically significant relation at 0.01, and moment correlation coefficient from .55 to .83. This indicated that the test construct was validity.
  1.3 Test Reliability
In this step, α-coefficient was used to find out the test reliability. Reliability in listening, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar parts of TNI English ability test

were 0.84, 0.86, 0.88, 0.89 and 0.90 respectively. A whole set of TNI English ability test was 0.87, and the standard error of the estimate was between 0.74-0.89.

Part 2 Study of students' learning ability of five parts- listening, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar by faculty

1. Scores of English skills

The total mean score of students was 34.46. The highest mean score was from vocabulary part which was 8.49. However, the lowest mean score was from listening part as 7.06 out of 12.

2. Scores by Faculty

The total mean score of students was 34.46 out of 600. The highest mean score was from Business Administration students which were 34.76, followed by Information Technology students and Engineering students as 34.46 and 34.18 respectively.

V. DISCUSSION

According to research analysis, discussion is as follows:

1. The Content Validity of the test had IOC between 0.70- 1.00. This showed that TNI English ability test was achieved a high content validity which is related to Innes and Straker [6] who note that if IOC is at least 0.70 or more, the test could be used to represent a group behavior. This may be because the test was constructed following the procedure of language testing. The test items are arranged on another scale according to their difficulty. From the undergraduate students' performance on those items, it was drawn conclusions about their ability [2], [3].

2. From the research results, it was found that the total mean score of students was 34.46. It might be because the undergraduate students use English learning strategies continuously. Furthermore, an English learning theory developed by Stern [7]. He believed that the good language learner is characterized by a personal learning style or positive learning strategies, an active approach to the learning task, a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language which is empathetic with its speakers, technical know-how about how to tackle a language, strategies of experimentation and planning with the object of developing the new language into an ordered system with progressive revision, constantly searching for meaning, willingness to practice, willingness to use the language in real communication, critically sensitive self-monitoring in language use [8].

For results from language skills, students scored an overall average of 34.46 out of 60. The highest scores were from vocabulary skill ($\overline{x}$=8.49 out of 12(as the students might learn vocabulary from elementary school to tertiary level. Therefore, they know range of vocabulary more than other skills. This is related to the concept of Chomsky [9] who states that learning skills are important to learn because human is able to learn the two levels of language ability and

the ability of expression. linguistic competence, thus, has been discussed in two levels: 1) linguistic competence refers to the ability happens automatically within everyone's native capabilities include the ability to create and understand sentences without a language endlessly and 2) the ability of expression or linguistic performance refers to the ability to apply knowledge to practical use in the expression.

The lowest scores from listening skill)$\overline{x}$=7.06 out of 12(which may be because students learn listening skill inadequately in class. Therefore, according to the study result, teaching listening skill should be taught before other skills. Valette and Disick [10] indicate that the learners should know the level of their ability in listening and can remember the message from hearing, can understand relationship of language structures, can understand feeling of speakers. Krashen [11], further, advocates that levels of listening ability can be divided into 5 skills: mechanical skill, knowledge skill, transfer skill, communication skill and criticism skill.

3. For result from faculty, the average of overall scores was 34.46 out of 60. The students from faculty of Business Administration had the highest scores ($\overline{x}$ =34.76). The second highest scores were from faculty of Information Technology ($\overline{x}$=34.46). However, the lowest scores were from faculty of Engineering ($\overline{x}$ =34.18). This might be because the students from faculty of Business Administration used communicative approach in classroom learning. The students, therefore, have interaction with friends and teachers in the classroom through several teaching activities which were focused on learning objectives, contents and correct language structures. This is related to the notion of Harmer [12]who demonstrates that learners should be expressed by using languages with friends and teachers in the communicative classroom environment. Communicative activities should be applied in teaching. Then, learners can learn language by focusing on contents more than language form, and they can use language according to their needs. When learners express in language communication, teachers should not interrupt learners, and not limit information for communication.

On the other hand, the students from faculty of Engineering had the lowest scores ($\overline{x}$ =34.18) which might be because teaching-learning process of engineering students was mainly focused on teaching for memorization more than communication. Thus, an effective teaching-learning approach should be employed through various activities such as a group work, and a pair work. These activities can support the effective result of outcome which related to the concept of Moore [13] who illustrates that management of successful language teaching-learning should be done differently from traditional teaching. The new approach for teaching, consequently, should be arranged in communicative approach which consisted of various activities such as role play and storytelling. The student, therefore, have a chance to practice their communicative skills through their activities effectively.

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Appendix
A

p - r value of English learning ability test (60 items)

Difficulty) p (and Discrimination of the test

item	p	r	item	p	r
1	0.44	0.61	31	0.52	0.36
2	0.51	0.33	32	0.60	0.48
3	0.61	0.45	33	0.44	0.36
4	0.69	0.33	34	0.48	0.23
5	0.36	0.26	35	0.54	0.26
6	0.49	0.41	36	0.54	0.21
7	0.55	0.33	37	0.46	0.58
8	0.56	0.31	38	0.54	0.38
9	0.68	0.25	39	0.61	0.55
10	0.45	0.39	40	0.48	0.48
11	0.59	0.26	41	0.45	0.31
12	0.63	0.22	42	0.58	0.33
13	0.46	0.62	43	0.52	0.31
14	0.54	0.38	44	0.60	0.29
15	0.55	0.33	45	0.44	0.36
16	0.65	0.55	46	0.48	0.48
17	0.68	0.24	47	0.54	0.33
18	0.45	0.39	48	0.54	0.38
19	0.32	0.36	49	0.54	0.38
20	0.45	0.31	50	0.54	0.33
21	0.58	0.23	51	0.65	0.55
22	0.49	0.41	52	0.58	0.33
23	0.52	0.21	53	0.45	0.31
24	0.61	0.21	54	0.48	0.48
25	0.49	0.46	55	0.58	0.23
26	0.52	0.25	56	0.52	0.21
27	0.46	0.66	57	0.58	0.33
28	0.59	0.37	58	0.48	0.48
29	0.63	0.54	59	0.38	0.36
30	0.64	0.26	60	0.61	0.21