

**DESIGNING EPT TRAINING SYLLABUSES
FOR NON-ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS
OF UNIPDU JOMBANG
(A STUDENTS' NEEDS ANALYSIS)**

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Abstract

The EPT test is an internationally accepted standard of English that measures the academic English proficiency of a non-native speaker of English. This research is aimed at designing EPT training syllabuses that meet the needs of non-English department students of UNIPDU Jombang with low level of English proficiency. In general, the contents of the syllabuses based on the students' needs analysis are as follows: 1. Listening comprehension: PART A: meaning questions, suggestion, prediction, implication, inferences, PART B: topics of conversations, details of conversations, PART C: topics of talks/lectures, details of talks/lectures; 2. Structure and Written Expression: a. Incomplete sentences: conjunctions, comparisons, subject missing, adjective clauses, b. Underlined words: count/non-count nouns, banana rule, adjectives, prepositions, noun-pronoun agreement, singular/plural nouns; 3. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary: References, passage organization, exception, inferences, topics, main ideas.

Keywords: EPT, students' needs, syllabuses

A. INTRODUCTION

The EPT (ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST) is a test of standard English that is used to measure the academic English proficiency of a non-native speaker of English. EPT is organized by UNIPDU to measure the ability of its students to use and understand English as it is spoken, written and heard in college and university settings. EPT uses PBT TOEFL format as the model of the test. It consists of three Sections: Section 1. Listening Comprehension, Section 2. Structure and Written Expression, and

Section 3. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary.

In preparing non-English department students for the EPT test, the EPT trainers at UNIPDU often face some difficulties. First, they come from different English language background and, by and large, have insufficient English skills. Second, there are so many topics or problems to discuss while the time allotted for the class preparation is limited. At UNIPDU, the EPT training is only conducted in 20 and 30 hours (13 – 19 meetings). Such situation, of course, often makes EPT trainers at UNIPDU have difficulty deciding which topics

should be addressed in the training and which ones should not. As a result, the students often do not get what they actually need which in turn makes their scores on EPT remain low. Therefore sound syllabuses and teaching materials which comply with the students' needs are urgently needed.

The first and most important factor to be considered when constructing teaching materials is the learners. If the points of the materials are relevance, interest, motivation, and meeting specific students' needs, then clearly syllabus developers must ensure they know their learners well. Any consideration of syllabus or materials design must begin with a needs analysis.

Meeting students' or learners' needs is one of the effective and efficient ways in ESL teaching (Richards, 2003: 51). Students' needs are often described in terms of linguistic deficiency, that is, as describing the difference between what a learner can presently do in a language and what he or she should be able to do. One of the basic assumptions of curriculum development is that a sound educational program should be based on analysis of learners' needs (Richards, 2003: 51). Procedures used to collect information about learners' needs are known as needs analysis.

This research is aimed at designing EPT training syllabuses that meet the needs of non-English department students at UNIPDU with low level of English proficiency. An important advantage of specifying the target readers is contextualization. A key criticism of commercial materials, particularly those produced for the world-wide market is that they are necessarily generic and not aimed at any specific group of learners or any particular cultural or educational

context. Thus by specifying the target readers, the problem of lack of 'fit' of the syllabus will be able to overcome.

B. FINDINGS

1. The results of question items analysis

a. Listening Comprehension

After conducting an analysis on 300 listening questions in Part A. Listening Section (Short Conversations), it is found out that nine problems are present in this part. Out of them, five are regarded as commonly found problems: meaning question, implication, inference, suggestion, and prediction.

In Part B Listening Section (Longer Conversation), there are 81 questions analyzed. Among the questions, it is identified that 6 kinds of problems exist. However, as can be seen in the table above, there are only two problems that can be said as commonly found in this part.

In part C Listening Section, there are 119 questions analyzed. Among the questions, 5 kinds of problems are identified, and only two problems are categorized as commonly found in this part: details and topic.

b. Structure and Written Expressions

1) Incomplete Sentences

Questions number 1 to 15 in Structure and Written expressions section are called 'incomplete sentences'. Here the test takers are required to complete a sentence with one of four possible answers provided. In this type of question, out of 150 questions analyzed, 35 problems are identified and nine problems can be categorized as commonly found problems: Adjective clauses,

conjunctions, verbs, subject missing, S+V missing, comparisons, adverbs, participial phrases, and appositives.

2) Underlined Words

Questions number 16 to 40 are underlined words. The test takers are to choose the incorrect words/phrase among four underlined words/phrases. There are 250 questions analyzed. Out of them 37 problems are identified. As can be seen in the table above, 16 problems can be said as commonly found problems. They are adjectives, prepositions, noun forms, singular/plural nouns, articles, adjective clauses, passive voice, adverbs, subject-verb agreement, conjunctions, noun-pronoun agreement, count/non count nouns, banana rule, word order, tenses and phrasal verbs. The problems can be grouped into seven groups: sentence patterns, phrasal construction, connectors, verb tenses, preposition, word classes, and agreement.

c. Reading Comprehension

After analyzing 500 reading questions, it is found out that 12 problems exist. Out of them, eight are regarded as commonly found are obtained.

problems: vocabulary, details, reference, topic, exception, inference, passage organization, and main idea.

2. The students' weakness points

After conducting the test to the respondents based on the common problems found in EPT, the following results

a. Listening Comprehension

1) Listening: Part A

In part A, it is found out that the respondents had difficulty on all kinds of problems. The following table shows the list of students' weakness points from the most problematic to the least one.

| No. | Problems | Number of students | Percentage |
|-----|------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1 | inference | 3 | 6.82 |
| 2 | meaning question | 5 | 11.36 |
| 3 | suggestion | 5 | 11.36 |
| 4 | prediction | 6 | 13.64 |
| 5 | implication | 11 | 25.00 |

2) Listening: Part B

In part B Listening Section, as discussed earlier, there are two common types of problems: topics and details. On these types of problems, it is identified that the students mainly had problem on topic questions. Out of 44 respondents, 39 students had trouble figuring out the conversational topics.

The following table shows the list of students' weakness points in Part B. Listening from the most problematic to the least one.

| No. | Problems | Number of students | Percentage |
|-----|----------|--------------------|------------|
| 1 | topics | 5 | 11.36 |
| 2 | details | 16 | 36.36 |

3) Listening: Part C

In Part C, the most difficult problem for the respondents is details of the talks/lectures where only 6 students (13.64 %) had no problem on it. The nature of the talks or lectures which are commonly long may contributable to the students' errors. On the other hand, many respondents did not have any difficulty identifying the topics of the

talks/lectures. 30 students (68.18 %) could handle the questions well.

The following table shows the list of students' weakness points in Part C. Listening from the most problematic to the least one.

| No. | Problems | Number of students | Percentage |
|-----|----------|--------------------|------------|
| 1 | Details | 6 | 13.64 |
| 2 | Topics | 30 | 68.18 |

b. Structure and Written Expression

1) Incomplete Sentences

The most problematic question for the respondents is that on participial phrases. There were only 2 students (4.55 %) who could answer the questions well. Constructing a participial phrase is one of difficult rules in English and is of advanced level. The knowledge on '-ed' and '-ing' is a must to be able to answer the questions of this problem. The least troublesome problem is verb missing. Some questions ask the correct form of the verb and some ask which verb that agrees with the subject. On this problem, many respondents (52.27 %) could handle the problem suitably.

The following table shows the list of students' weakness points in 'Incomplete Sentences' type of questions from the most problematic to the least one.

| No | Problems | Number of students | Percentage |
|----|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1 | participial phrases | 2 | 4.55 |
| 2 | comparisons | 8 | 18.18 |
| 3 | subject missing | 12 | 27.27 |
| 4 | conjunctions | 13 | 29.55 |
| 5 | adjective clauses | 14 | 31.82 |
| 6 | S+V missing | 16 | 36.36 |

| | | | |
|---|--------------|----|-------|
| 7 | appositives | 18 | 40.91 |
| 8 | adverbs | 20 | 45.45 |
| 9 | verb missing | 23 | 52.27 |

2) Underlined words

The following table shows that the most challenging problem in 'underlined words' type of question is count/non-count nouns. Out of 44 respondents, only 1 student (2.27 %) could answer the questions. The least troublesome problem is subject-verb agreement. Here 25 students (56.82 %) could answer the questions well.

The following table shows the list of students' weakness points in 'Underlined Words' type of questions from the most problematic to the least one.

| No | Problems | Number of students | Percentage |
|----|------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1 | count/non count nouns | 1 | 2.27 |
| 2 | noun-pronoun agreement | 3 | 6.82 |
| 3 | adjectives | 4 | 9.09 |
| 4 | prepositions | 5 | 11.36 |
| 5 | banana rule | 5 | 11.36 |
| 6 | tenses | 5 | 11.36 |
| 7 | singular/plural noun | 6 | 13.64 |
| 8 | articles | 7 | 15.91 |
| 9 | phrasal verbs | 8 | 18.18 |
| 10 | word order | 9 | 20.45 |
| 11 | conjunctions | 9 | 20.45 |
| 12 | adverbs | 10 | 22.73 |
| 13 | noun forms | 11 | 25.00 |
| 14 | adjective clauses | 16 | 36.36 |
| 15 | passive voice | 17 | 38.64 |
| 16 | subject-verb agreement | 25 | 56.82 |

c. Reading Comprehension

The following table shows that locating references is the most difficult problem for the respondents. The least difficult problem is that on details of the passage. Many respondents seemed to be able to apply their scanning technique quite well. At least it is indicated by the number of the respondents who could manage such questions.

The following table shows the list of students' weakness points in Reading Comprehension from the most problematic to the least one.

| No | Problems | Number of students | Percentage |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1 | References | 10 | 22.73 |
| 2 | exceptions | 11 | 25.00 |
| 3 | inferences | 11 | 25.00 |
| 4 | referring to the passage | 11 | 25.00 |
| 5 | topics | 17 | 38.64 |
| 6 | main ideas | 20 | 45.45 |
| 7 | vocabularies | 23 | 52.27 |
| 8 | details | 29 | 65.91 |

C. DISCUSSION

EPT test is aimed at measuring a student's English proficiency in academic setting. Academic English refers to the language used by the educated people and is needed to function at the university level and beyond.

1. Listening Section

The listening section of EPT test focuses on measuring the test takers' understanding of spoken English especially that in academic setting (class discussion, lectures, etc). Sharpe (2007: 67-152) suggests four academic skills a student must possess to succeed in his/her study. The skills are taking notes, paraphrasing, summarizing, and

synthesizing. In EPT listening, the skills are represented and tested by different types of questions. As described earlier, the common problems found in Listening section are meaning questions, implication, inference, suggestion, prediction, topics and details of conversation/talks/lectures.

In EPT Listening, the taking notes skill is tested by the questions on details of conversation/talks/ lectures. Sharpe (2007: 67) explains that this skill refers to how well a student identifies important information including all the main ideas and major facts of what he/she hear/read it.

The second academic skill tested in EPT Listening is paraphrasing. Paraphrasing means using different words to express the same meaning (Sharpe, 2007: 87). In EPT Listening, the paraphrasing skill is represented by the questions on meaning, suggestion, implication, and inferences.

The skill of summarizing in EPT Listening is tested by questions on topic and inferences. According to Sharpe (2007: 14), summarizing is related to paraphrasing because the test takers should use their own words to express an idea they have heard. To be successful academically, the students must be able to find the gist of a lecture or talks.

In short, it can be said that the EPT Listening questions are aimed at measuring three test takers' academic skills (taking notes, paraphrasing, and summarizing). Through the testing on such skills, the result of the EPT listening test should give a description of a student's ability in understanding spoken English.

In relation with the respondents' listening skill, it can be concluded that the respondents are not ready to follow a lecture or talk delivered in English yet.

At least it can be seen from the respondents' test results. Among the common listening skills tested, the students have difficulty in all EPT listening problems. Firstly they show a lack of taking notes skills as indicated by their poor test results on details questions. Secondly, they show a lack of paraphrasing skill, as indicated by the test results on meaning, suggestion, implication, and inference questions. Finally, they also don't have ability in understanding a gist of a conversation or lecture as indicated by their poor results on topic questions.

2. Structure and Written Expression Section

Section 2 of the EPT Test deals with grammatical problems. Based on the findings discussed earlier, the common problems found in EPT can be classified into seven groups: sentence patterns, phrasal constructions, connectors, verb tenses, classes of words, degrees of comparison, and agreement. According to Wishon and Burks (1980) the seven grammar problems are the major theme a student should master to be able to write well in English.

Considering the common problems found, it can be concluded that Section 2 of EPT mainly assesses the test takers' ability in developing English sentence patterns of written English in their simple and expanded forms and in the major transformations of those forms. The results of the test will not only give description about the test takers' writing skills but also their reading comprehension – as we know many researches show a close relationship between grammatical competence and writing competence

(Fatemi, 2008) or reading competence (Lopez, 2008).

Considering the respondents' test results, it can be concluded that the respondents have difficulty in writing good English. Among the common grammar skills tested, the students have problem in almost all EPT grammar problems. In general, it can be seen from their test results on three important grammatical points: sentence pattern, phrasal construction, and classes of words. Firstly, they don't have good knowledge on English sentence patterns as indicated by their poor test results on the questions of subject verb missing, S+V missing, and passive voice. Secondly, they have problems with phrasal constructions, as shown by their poor test results on appositives, participial phrases, and phrasal word order. Thirdly, the respondents also don't have good knowledge on English classes of words as can be seen from their unsatisfying test results on articles, nouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, and adverbs.

3. Reading Section

The EPT Reading section focuses on measuring the test takers' understanding of written English especially that in academic setting (e.g. scientific, social passages, etc). The EPT Reading questions relate to the academic skills, namely note taking, paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing. In EPT Reading, the skills are represented and tested by different types of questions. As described earlier, the common problems found in Reading section are references, exceptions, inferences, passage organization, topics, main ideas, vocabularies, and details.

Firstly EPT Reading assesses the taking notes skill. Sharpe (2007: 67)

explains that this skill refers to how well a student identifies important information including all the main ideas and major facts of what he/she read it. In EPT Reading, the taking notes skill is tested by the questions on details, main ideas, exception and passage organization.

The second academic skill tested in EPT Reading is paraphrasing. Paraphrasing means using different words to express the same meaning (Sharpe, 2007: 87). In EPT Reading, the paraphrasing skill is represented by the questions on vocabulary and references. The vocabulary questions will ask the test takers to identify the correct synonym of a word.

The skill of summarizing in EPT Reading is tested by the topic and inference questions. According to Sharpe (2007: 14), summarizing is related to paraphrasing because the test takers should use their own words to express an idea they have read. To be successful academically, the students must be able to find the gist of a lecture or talks.

In short, it can be said that the EPT Reading questions are aimed at measuring three test takers' academic skills (taking notes, paraphrasing, and summarizing). Through the testing on such skills, the result of the EPT Reading test should give a description of a student's ability in understanding English texts.

Considering the respondents' test results, it can be concluded that the respondents are lack of three academic skills in reading: taking notes, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Among the common reading skills tested, the students have difficulty in all EPT reading problems. Firstly they show a lack of taking notes skills as indicated by

their poor test results on the questions of details, main ideas, exception and passage organization. Secondly, they show a lack of paraphrasing skill, as shown by the test results on vocabulary and references. Finally, they also don't have ability in understanding a gist of a conversation or lecture as indicated by their poor results on topic and inference questions.

D. THE IMPLICATION ON THE SYLLABUSES MAKING

1. The syllabuses

Concerning that this study would like to build teaching materials which help students get better scores on EPT, the following course rationale is constructed.

This course is designed for the students who would like to take EPT test or any tests like EPT. This course seeks to enable the students get EPT score of 475 up. It teaches the problems (in Listening, Structure, and Reading) which are commonly found in EPT. This course is designed to give the students the materials which are suitable to their strengths. It provides them with many practices resemble to the actual questions in EPT, in order that they will be familiar with the question formats. It also seeks to develop the students' skills in independent learning outside the classroom.

The syllabuses constructed apply the topical or content-based framework. This is a syllabus that is organized around themes (Richards, 2003: 157). With a topical syllabus, content rather than grammar, functions, or situation is

the starting point in syllabus design. This framework is chosen in line with the nature of the course that would be developed. The course as mentioned in the course rationale above would like to teach the common EPT problems to the participants/students.

The content of the course will depend on the learners' proficiency levels (Richards, 2003: 148). The information gathered during needs analysis will contribute to the planning of course contents..

Finally, considering the common problems found, the weakness points of the students on EPT, and the number of meetings allocated for each section/parts, the following problems will be included in the teaching process (the complementing materials will include the practices on other commonly found problems that can be self-studied by the students).

a. The suggested syllabuses for 20-hour training

Considering the number of meetings allocated, the number of common problems found and the students' weakness points, all problems can be accommodated in the teaching process with the following topical breakdowns.

Section 1. Listening Comprehension (5 meetings)

1. Part A: 3 meetings
Meeting 1: meaning questions
Meeting 2: suggestion, prediction
Meeting 3: implication, inference
2. Part B: – 1 meeting
Meeting 4: topics of conversations, details of conversations
3. Part C: – 1 meeting

Meeting 5: topics of talks/lectures, details of talks/lectures

Section 2. Structure and Written Expression (5 meetings)

1. Incomplete sentences: – 2 meetings
Meeting 6: conjunctions, comparisons,
Meeting 7: subject missing, adjective clauses
2. Underlined words: – 3 meetings
Meeting 8: count/non-count nouns, banana rule
Meeting 9: adjectives, prepositions
Meeting 10: noun-pronoun agreement, singular/plural noun

Section 3. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary

1. Common problems in TOEFL Reading: – 3 meetings
Meeting 11: reference, passage organization
Meeting 12: exception, inferences
Meeting 13: topics, main ideas

b. The suggested syllabus for 30-hour training

In general there is no significant difference between the syllabus for 20-hour training and that for 30-hour. The main difference is that on the composition of problems in Structure and Written expressions and Reading Comprehension where there are more problems accommodated. The process of selecting the contents of the syllabus is still the same: Considering the number of common problems found, the students' weakness points, and the number of meetings allocated for each section.

The syllabus for the 30-hour training is thus as follows:

Section 1. Listening Comprehension (7 meetings)

- 1) Part A: – 4 meetings
Meeting 1: meaning questions
Meeting 2: suggestion
Meeting 3: prediction
Meeting 4: inference, implication
- 2) Part B: – 2 meetings
Meeting 5: topics of conversations
Meeting 6: details of conversations
- 3) Part C: – 1 meeting
Meeting 7: topics and details of conversations

Section 2. Structure and Written Expression (7 meetings)

- 1) Incomplete sentences: – 3 meetings
Meeting 8: conjunctions, comparisons
Meeting 9: subject missing, S+V missing
Meeting 10: adjective clauses, participial phrases
- 2) Underlined words: – 4 meetings
Meeting 11: articles, banana rule
Meeting 12: adjectives, prepositions
Meeting 13: noun-pronoun agreement, tenses
Meeting 14: singular/plural nouns, count/non count nouns

Section 3. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary (5 meetings)

- Meeting 15: vocabulary
- Meeting 16: reference, passage organization
- Meeting 17: details, exception
- Meeting 18: inference
- Meeting 19: topics, main ideas

E. CONCLUSION

An important advantage of specifying the target readers is contextualization. A key criticism of commercial materials, particularly those produced for the world-wide market is that they are necessarily generic and not aimed at any specific group of learners or any particular cultural or educational context. Thus by specifying the target readers, the problem of lack of 'fit' of the course book will be able to overcome.

The term *needs* is sometimes used to refer to *wants, desires, demands, expectation, motivations, lacks, constraints, and requirements* (Brindley 1984: 28). Needs are also often described in terms of a linguistic deficiency, that is, as describing the difference between what a learner can presently do in a language and what he or she should be able to do (Richards, 2003: 54).

This research is aimed at designing EPT training syllabuses that meet the needs of non-English department students of UNIPDU Jombang with low level of English proficiency. The main problem faced by the teachers in giving training on EPT is the time constraint. They usually have very limited time to teach while at the same time they have many topics to deliver. Therefore they often have difficulty deciding which topics that should be given and which ones are not. The problem is even worse when the students have low proficiency of English.

In relation with the nature of EPT questions, it can be concluded that the questions are aimed at assessing the readiness of the students in studying in college or university. The listening and reading sections concern with three

academic skills: taking notes, paraphrasing, and summarizing. The grammar section tests the knowledge of the students in building good English sentences.

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