

YARSI UNIVERSITY PROGRAM TO MEET THE DEMAND OF STUDENT'S ENGLISH FLUENCY WITH TOEIC AS THE ASSESSMENT TOOL

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Abstract: A test is only a measurement tool of a learning process. The important part is the learning process itself; how the process can help learners acquire English as a foreign language that enables them to compete in the working environment. To measure the process, TOEIC with all its parts was meant to measure learners' ability to communicate in English. Teachers should not be focusing on the test but more on the approaches that allow the students to have adequate and sophisticated listening, reading, and writing skills to exchange information and to negotiate meaning in real life. Many university level English teachers are trapped within the rules that students should achieve a 550 or 605 TOEIC score to graduate. Instead of helping the students to acquire the language as a communication tool, they tend to focus more on getting the students to master the test. This is what teachers should deal with, not only facilitate students to learn the language but at the same time help them to do the test well. Despite the challenge of facing students who lack motivation and have very basic English skills, Yarsi University Language Lab is setting up several programs and approaches that allow students to acquire the language and enable them to communicate in the target language which is eventually measured by an instrument called TOEIC.

Keywords: *Language Acquisition, direct and indirect test, discrete and integrative*

Introduction

“By the end of the twentieth century English was already well on its way to becoming a genuine *lingua franca*, that is language used widely for communication between people who do not share the same language.” (Harmer: 13). To deal with this, Yarsi Rector in his letter in 2011, stated that all Yarsi graduate studying Economics, Law, IT, and Psychology should have a 550 score TOEIC as requirement to get their certificate to prove that they have mastered the *lingua franca*. This decision is aimed at preparing Yarsi graduates to be able to compete in the working place. Especially, in 2015, when Indonesia will deal with ASEAN Economic Community where not only goods can be brought to any countries in South East Asia countries, but also human people can apply to any job vacancies within the region. When the time comes, English will not only be a tool to communicate with English speaking countries, but also a tool to communicate with ASEAN countries. Then, Yarsi University sets a target to produce graduates who are not only good in their field but also able to speak English.

To meet the goal Yarsi University needs to know newly registered students' English competence, to set appropriate programs and approaches while the students studying in Yarsi, to measure their progress and to find out the final result. To do so, a placement test is conducted to find out what the students know and what they do not know (Harmer: 166) This placement test is needed to group the students into homogenous classes, so they can learn better. After studying for five semesters, Yarsi hold a progress test to measure students achievement in English and to find out how well students have mastered English and mingled with this target language (Harmer: 166). In the sixth semester, students take an Exit test. This test is aimed to measure student's final achievement in English and to see how they have learned the materials during the semesters. These all three test are held by ITC as the reliable test center. In short, Yarsi students take three kind of TOEIC test during their studying time in Yarsi.

I believe that a test is only a measurement tool of the learning process itself. And the important thing is how students can acquire the language that enable them to communicate in English in their daily life and able to compete in their future working place. Language acquisition is an ideal way of learning a language. It is an effortless learning process with a maximum result (Harmer: 49). This learning concept really suits the situation in Yarsi where students have very basic English skills and really lack motivation. Setting fun and relaxing situation has become a necessity which is conducted in a process that allows students to acquire the language in conscious learning (Harmer: 51).

Not only students' very low basic skills, lack of motivation, and lack of interest, Yarsi University has to deal also with limited time for studying English. Students are overloaded with their major subjects. English is only given three to four credits in different faculties. This limitation makes an ideal learning process of English almost impossible to do.

Concerning the above issues, Optima Language Center, as a language laboratory which is in charge of conducting English subjects for all students in Yarsi University, applies some strategies to help students to master the language and eventually equip them with this soft skill.

Discussion

To achieve this destination, Optima Language Center applies several strategies:

1. Proposing six semesters for studying English.

As mentioned before, students are only given three to four credits for English subjects. Instead of letting the students study English in their first semester only, Optima Language Center made an agreement with the faculties to have students have learned English for six semesters in a row. Since they only have three to four credits, we set them Non Credited classes as well. This is the features:

	Law: 4 credits	IT :3 credits	Eco: 4 credits	Psy: 2 credits
Semester 1	CREDITED	CREDITED	CREDITED	CREDITED
Semester 2	CREDITED	CREDITED	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED
Semester 3	CREDITED	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED
Semester 4	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED
Semester 5	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED	NON-CREDITED
Semester 6	CREDITED	CREDITED	CREDITED	CREDITED

So, we have students coming every semester and score them pass/fail in the non-credited semester.

2. Appreciating class participation besides both mid and final tests.

To pass an English class, students have to collect this score:

ASSESSMENT POLICY

No	Item Description	Max %	Freq / program	Points/ Session	SUB TOTAL	Actual %
1	Attendance	10	14	4	56	10%
2	Participation	50	14	20	280	52%
3	Quizzes / Project	20	4	25	100	19%
4	Mid Exam	10	1	50	50	9%
5	Final Exam	10	1	50	50	9%
TOTAL		100			536	100%
*	Extra	11	3	15	45	8%

This table shows that students should attend meeting and participate in the class activities and interact with their friends and teachers in English. We score mid and final test only for 10%. Meanwhile, when it is a non-credited semester, students should collect 80 point minimally to pass. This number can be gained by coming to class on time and participate in class activities. By requiring the students to always coming to the class, it is expected that they are exposed to a lot of English. While they are scored for their class participation in the form of receptive and productive skills, it is hoped that students get used to mingling with the language and the teachers which may trigger students to communicate spontaneously (Harmer: 50)

3. Designing communicative approach syllabus.

In the first and second semester, we facilitate students in achieving goals that generally enable them to ask and answer questions about their personal identity. In these two semesters, we emphasize on language expressions in daily life. Basically, the classes are general English classes. At the time being, we are using indirect test items (Harmer: 168) as the achievement measurement tool for these classes. We are preparing more on integrative tests where students are able to perform special task successfully by using various language expressions and language skills. Interview, role play, and describing person and situation and activities are items we plan to do in the future for these general English programs.

Meanwhile, in the third to sixth semesters, we design new syllabus which will help the students to be able to accomplish well in their TOEIC test. We cannot deny the fact that students have to achieve the minimal score 550 TOEIC while their capability is far below that starting from 180 TOEIC. With these numbers, helping the students to get familiar with the test is a must. However, we do not put aside the ideal concept of language learning. In designing the syllabus and module, we have to meet these two goals.

What students need to know about the TOEIC test is that there will be two parts of the test. Listening part consists of describing pictures, question and response, and longer dialogues. The second part is reading, with inserting verbs and reading various kinds of materials, emails, ads and invoices. Bottom line, TOEIC tests students' competence in all language skills in the form of indirect tests. Harmer says in his book, "When we are engaged in a conversation, we are bound to listen as well as speak because otherwise we could not interact with the person we are speaking to..." (pg. 265) It means, the first part of the test measures learners' listening skill while at the same time indirectly checks learners' skill in speaking. Our strategies in dealing with these two skills in the same part of the test is by getting the students familiar with the vocabulary mostly found in the test which they actually use often in their daily talks. Using frequently tested kinds of pictures and short conversations we set the situation in modules where students can notice vocabulary, language expressions, and grammar points and words pronunciation at the same time. To lead them in an effective way to the listening skills, we make them describe pictures, ask questions and give response appropriately in speaking or the productive skill. In this situation, the learning process can be fun and relaxing and the students are not forced to do the test, because they are actually learning the language as a mean of exchanging information and interacting with their classmates and teacher, for this short term.

In reading with sentence completions, students are led to be able to recognize the correct form of sentence structure. It can be done by leading them to identify it themselves and conclude it by themselves as well, before they perform special tasks in an indirect kind of test in this particular session. Further, in the reading text, students are asked to conclude messages in the reading materials report and share it with their friends. The way we can assess them in this particular part is by asking them to answer emails, write their own emails with given situation. To cover the TOEIC part, we ask them to create commonly used questions in TOEIC based on their friends' writings.

We manage to come as close as possible to the test, while at the same time we set the situation so students do not learn the language for the TOEIC test. Instead they learn particular materials in our module to enable them to communicate and negotiate meaning.

4. Organizing English club

We believe proper exposure and repetition help students a lot in mastering English. For this reason we manage to hold an English club every Fridays for two hours. Some students from different faculties in Yarsi run this club under our guidance. Students who have come to this club found it beneficial. However, there are not enough students coming to the meeting. This can be caused by an information gap, which we try to overcome by having a communication board. Hopefully, next semester more students will join the club.

Conclusion

TOEIC with all its parts basically tests learners' receptive and productive skills. English teachers should not focus on the test only and forget about the concept of language learning. It is tolerated that teachers prepare the students to do the test successfully; however, we have to remember that completing the test is not the goal of learning a language. Learning English is to be able to communicate with people who do not speak our language. What we need to do as English teachers is to set a fun and relaxing situation where students can learn the language in through language acquisition. Sufficient amount of time with good quality of input and sufficient time to practice using the language are the only two we need to focus on. Then let the test measure how well the students can perform.

Bibliography

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