

Which English Test Suits You?

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Abstract

Most people took their English proficiency test as demanded by their companies, schools, or universities. They dominantly knew nothing about the test result function and reflection. One of worldwide English test providers is University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. All the tests offered are surely reliable and valid due to their thoroughly research and investigation framework. However, most people are still confused of what to take for their own personal needs since the tests offered by ESOL Examinations are really varied. Therefore, this study was trying to descriptively describe some ESOL's tests by investigating the tests one by one. The problems were (1) what tests are available to describe English language ability from ESOL Examination?, (2) what are the available tests for?, (3) what does the test result reflect?. The findings were descriptively discussed by seeing the documentation data from brochures, leaflets, and websites. There were four categories of test which have different purposes such as young learners English, general English, academics and professional English, and business English. The test results reflects different ability of English language of the test takers, such as level A1 in Listening/Speaking shows that the test takers can understand basic instructions or take part in a basic factual conversation on a predictable topic. In conclusion, different purposes of test takers needed different type of language tests.

Keywords: English Proficiency Test, ESOL Examination, and Language Ability.

a. Introduction

Human always communicates each other during their lives. The communication could be in a form of oral or written communication. Language takes part in the communication process. The intensity of human contact all over the world through social media in the internet is inevitably demanded the use of global language. Then, English is the only answered since it is a worldwide language. Accordingly, Indonesian Learners realize about the needs of mastering foreign or second language besides their mother tongue or first language. More people are learning English for personal or professional needs (Thu, 2010).

In learning process, the learners surely wish to be able to use foreign or second language as their communication based. However, to know whether or not they have achieved certain levels of needs, they should assess and so evaluate their skills on the language learned. This assessment or evaluation is usually in a form of test. As it is known that the appropriate learning process should be looking at some typically procedures (1) the situation in which the learning occurs; (2) the needs of the learners; (3) the principles on which the learning is based; (4) the goal of the learning; (5) the content of the learning; (6) the way in which the learning process is presented, that is, the activities which are used in the course and the format of the coursebook; (7) the monitoring and assessment used; and, finally (8) the evaluation of the learning result (Nation, 2000a cited in Nation and Newton, 2009)

The process of assessment and evaluation should suit the purposes of the evaluation itself. The evaluation can be represented by the use of a test which is commonly called as English proficiency test and/or English comprehension test. As it is noted in Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) that English proficiency test is a test which measures how much of a language someone has learned. The test measures the learners' general level of language mastery. Some proficiency tests have been standardized for worldwide use, such as IELTS and TOEFL Test which aim to describe someone's level of English who wishes to study abroad in inner circle countries. There are many kind of tests offered by the test center such as TOEFL PBT, TOEFL IBT, IELTS, AcEPT, and soon. This kind of test, of course, have different format and offer different purposes. Unfortunately, these standardized proficiency tests are malfunctioned by certain people. In fact, test takers only take the test as it is required by their institution. They know nothing about the test intended to whether they have met the needs or not. For example, people are asked to submit their TOEFL score for many purposes such as placement level of university, recruitment in some offices, and graduation requirement of university. The writer believes this phenomenon is not only happened in the writer environment but also in some other towns. . However, to have valid and reliable test for certain purposes, we need to take different type of test. One of worldwide test providers is University of Cambridge which is known as *Cambridge English Language Assessment*. Therefore, this makes the writer is interested in sharing some information about proficiency tests provided by University of Cambridge which might help the test takers decide which test suits them. Cambridge English language assessment is one of departments in University of Cambridge which provides various standardized tests.

This study tries to describe some tests' function and tests' result reflection. There were three problems of this study (1) what tests are available in Cambridge English Language Assessment?, (2) what are the tests for?, (3) what does the test result reflect?. Hopefully, this research can help test takers choose the test correctly.

b. Cambridge English Language Assessment

Cambridge English Speaker of Other Languages which is commonly known as Cambridge ESOL, now is renamed as Cambridge English Language Assessment. Cambridge English Language Assessment provides the world's most valuable range of exams and qualification for learners and teachers of English.

As it is noted in its website, there are some exams categories:

1. Young Learners of English
2. General English and for Schools
3. Academic and Professional English
4. Business English
5. Other European Languages
6. Teaching Qualifications for New Teachers
7. Teaching Qualification for Experienced Teachers
8. Teachers wanting to specialize

And each category has different range of tests. In this paper, it will only discuss young learners of English, General English and for Schools, Academic and professional English, and Business English.

c. Various Assessments for English Proficiency

Cambridge Young Learners English Tests

These days children are required to learn English at an early stage. When they learn English, teachers and parents must be sure to help them to speak good English. It is also important to make sure that they learn practical and useful English to prepare them for future English tests which are used for overseas education and international careers. Most of all, the children need to have confidence in using English as they grow up.

Young Learners of English which is familiar with YLE is designed for children in primary schools from first grade to sixth grade. There are three ranges for this kind of test, i.e., YLE starters, YLE Movers, and YLE flyers.

The Cambridge Young Learners Tests are designed to help children achieve international standards of English in primary school and they are taken by children all around the world. There are three levels of tests – starters, movers, and flyers – for children between the ages of 7 and 11. Each level of test has three components – reading/writing, listening and speaking – and all candidates receive an award showing the level they have achieved in each component.

General English and For Schools

Based on the information taken from its leaflet, it can be concluded that general English exams are designed for learners at all levels from the very advanced certificate of Proficiency in English to the elementary level Key English Test. The general English which is also known as The Main Suite Exams are also known throughout the world and are widely recognized for work and study purposes. The tests provide the test takers a wide variety of contexts, relevant to work, study and leisure activities. In this category, there are some tests available, they are YLE starters, YLE Movers, YLE Flyers, KET, PET, and FCE.

- Key English Test (KET)

KET is an elementary level exam. It tests the ability to cope with everyday written and spoken communication at a basic level. Passing KET shows that you can deal with everyday written and spoken English at a basic level. KET is at level A2 of the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)-an internationally recognized framework. The skills covered in this test are listed below:

Table 1.
Exam Format of Key English Test

Paper	Purpose
Reading and Writing (1 hour 10 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to show their ability in understanding simple written information, for instance, newspapers and magazines. Candidates will fill some blanks in simple sentences and write a short message (25-35 words).
Listening (about 30 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to show their ability to understand spoken materials and notices with a slow speed.
Speaking (10 minues per	Giving the candidates chances to have conversation about simple topics in pairs.

pair of candidates)	
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Taken and adapted from Key English Test leaflet

- Preliminary English Test (PET)

PET has likely similar purposes to KET. However, PET is at intermediate level exam. PET shows that the test takers can deal with everyday written and spoken English at higher level than KET. PET is at level B1 of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The exam format can be seen below:

Table 2.
Exam Format of Preliminary English Test

Paper	Purpose
Reading and Writing (1 hour 30 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to show their ability in understanding main points of texts from journals, newspapers, and magazines. The candidates will also show their ability in writing a story or letter of 100 words.
Listening (about 30 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to show their ability in understanding spoken materials about daily life issues including announcements, interviews, and simple topic discussion.
Speaking (12 minutes per pair of candidates)	Giving the candidates chances taking part in a conversation, asking and answering questions, and talking freely about their preferences.

Taken and adapted from Preliminary English Test leaflet

- First Certificate of English (FCE)

FCE is an upper-intermediate level of test which is designed for test taker to assess their English ability. The test is made based on familiar topics and situation so this can motivate the test takers to have their further qualification. The test covers some skills and the skills are listed in this table below:

Table 3.
Exam Format of First Certificate of English

Paper	Purpose
Reading (1 hour)	Giving the candidates chances to show their understanding of a text, including how they are organized.
Writing (1 hour 20 minutes)	Requiring the candidates to write two pieces of writing. The first is a letter or email (120-150 words), and it is compulsory. The second is the candidates' choice for an article, essay, letter, report, review or short story (120-180 words).
Use of English	Giving the candidates chances to show how well they can control their grammar and vocabulary.
Listening (about 40 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to show their understanding a range of familiar spoken materials, such as news programs, public announcements and other sources.

Speaking (14 minutes per pair of candidates)	Giving the candidates chances to show how well they can speak naturally to the examiner and other candidate(s).
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Taken from ESOL Website

Academic and Professional English

For the academic and professional English purposes, test taker can use these listed tests from Cambridge English Language Assessment, i.e., FCE, CAE, CPE, BEC Preliminary, BEC Vantage, BEC Higher, and BULATS.

- Certificate in Advanced English (CAE)

CAE is for professional or someone who communicates in English confidently and is a thorough test of all areas of language ability, and this exam is for study and work purposes. The exam format can be seen in this table below.

Table 4.
Exam Format of Certificate in Advanced English

Paper	Purpose
Reading (1 hour 15 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to deal confidently with various types of texts, such as fiction, newspapers, and magazines.
Writing (1 hour 30 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to create two different pieces of writing, such as articles, essays, letters, proposals, reports and reviews.
Use of English (1 hour)	Giving the candidates chances to use different types of exercise that show how well you can control your grammar and vocabulary.
Listening (about 40 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to show their ability in understanding a range of spoken materials, such as interviews, radio broadcasts, presentations, talks and everyday conversations.
Speaking (15 minutes per pair of candidates)	Giving the candidates chances to show their ability in effective face-to-face communication.

Taken from ESOL Website

- Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)

CPE is the most advanced qualification. Passing this exam proves the candidates to have an extremely high level in English. CPE is a very advanced level exam, for learners who have achieved a high level of language skills and are able to function effectively in almost any English-speaking context. The exam format can be seen below:

Table 5.
Exam Format of Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)

Paper	Purpose
Reading and use of English (1 hour 30 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to do skim reading and find for specific information.
Writing (1 hour 30 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances to show how well they can put together and develop ideas on a topic, the impression they make on the reader, their use of language, and how well they achieve the purpose for writing.
Listening (about 40 minutes)	Giving the candidates chances y to listen for a wide variety of real – life purposes.
Speaking (16 minutes per pair of candidates)	Giving the candidates chances to perform their ability in pronunciation, intonation, speed of delivery as well as their ability to organize their thoughts, negotiate and sustain a discussion.

- **Business English Certificates (BEC)**

BEC is a suite of three exams – BEC Preliminary, BEC Vantage, BEC Higher. The tests are designed to test English language ability used in the context of business. They are suitable for adults (aged 16 and over) who are either preparing for a career n business or already in work. The exams cover the same range of language skills as the main suite exams, but with the emphasis on activities that are common in business. BEC is available at three levels, BEC Higher level C1, BEC Vantage Level B2, BEC Preliminary Level B1.

- **BULATS**

The Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) is a multilingual assessment service for companies that require a rapid, accurate means of assessing language skills in English, French, German, and Spanish.

d. **Reading the results**

In every certificates issued by Cambridge for each test, there is stated the level of achievement. The leveling is based on Common European Framework Level. The complete leveling table can be seen as this table below:

Table 6.
Cambridge ESOL exams and the common European framework

C2	CPE		
C1	CAE	BEC Higher	
B2	FCE	BEC Vantage	

B1	PET	BEC Preliminary	
A2	KET		YLE Flyers
A1			YLE Movers
			YLE Starters

For general ability all levels above can be seen in skill detail, i.e., Listening/Speaking, Reading, and Writing. It can be listed that A1 candidates can understand basic instructions or take part in a basic factual conversation on a predictable topic, understand basic notices, instructions or information, complete basic forms and write notes including, times, dates, and places. A2 candidates can express simple opinions or requirements in a familiar context, understand straightforward information within a known area, such as products and signs and simple textbooks or reports on familiar matters, complete forms and write short simple letters or postcards related to personal information. B1 candidates can express opinions on abstract/cultural matters in a limited way or offer advice within a known area, and understand instructions or public announcements, understand routine information and articles, and the general meaning of non-routine information within a familiar area, write letters or make notes on familiar or predictable matters. B2 candidates can follow or give a talk on a familiar topic or keep up a conversation on a fairly wide range of topics, scan texts for relevant information and understand detailed instructions or advice, make notes while someone is talking or write letter including non-standards requests. C1 candidates can contribute effectively to meetings and seminars within own area of work or keep up a casual conversation with a good degree of fluency, coping with abstract expressions, read quickly enough to cope with an academic course, to read the media for information or to understand non-standard correspondence, prepare/draft professional correspondence, take reasonably accurate notes in meetings or write an essay which shows an ability to communicate. And, C2 candidates can advise on or talk about complex or sensitive issues, understanding colloquial references and dealing confidently with hostile questions, understand documents, correspondence and reports, including the finger points of complex texts, write letters on any subjects and full notes of meetings or seminars with good expression and accuracy.

Conclusion

Advices for the test takers, knowing the test in detail starting from its format, function, and purposes. Cambridge English Language Assessment has provided language learners various types of test with different assessment and purposes. Therefore, it is better for every test taker to know what their main purpose to take the test is. If they need to help their children in assessing their language ability, they are recommended to have Young English Learners series. However, if teenagers or adults need to see their comprehensive English skills thoroughly, it is recommended to have Main Suite Series. At last, if the people or companies need to see their prospective candidates' skill in English Business Skill, they should take Business and Professional English.

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