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Does English National Examination (UN) Assess Students' Communicative?

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Abstract

This study examined whether English National Examination assesses students' communicative competence of EFL in Indonesia or not. Communicative competence is considered as competence expected to be achieved by language learners which include grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and action competence. The data of this study was items test used in the English national examination 2017. All the data were qualitatively analyzed using the concept of content analysis in terms of the availability of five criteria of communicative competence in the English national examination. The data showed that two main categories are often shown in the test, discourse competence (68%), linguistic competence (20%) and the last 2 % is sociolinguistic competence. However, from the above-mentioned percentage of fulfillment, there are still 2 categories unfulfilled by the test such as strategic competence and action competence. The result indicated that the English national examination has not fully measured the communicative competence of the learners. This led educators to consider those aspects to create a test that can assess students' achievement comprehensively.

Keywords: Communicative Competence; Content Analysis; EFL Learners; National Examination.

INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence is a term that is closely related to language learning and language pedagogy whether in English as a second language or English as a foreign language (Valeeva, 2016).

For language learners, it seems to be a must to have communicative competence. It is reasonable considering that communicative is a concept for the situation expected to be achieved by language learners, especially in a second or foreign language. According to Canale and Swain (2014), communicative competence has at least four components to be achieved. They are grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Those components seem to cover every single aspect of the language field. Therefore, communicative competence is a crucial aspect to be achieved by those language learners in English as a foreign language field.

In Indonesia's education, English has been considered to be the first foreign language in Indonesia. Moreover, Indonesia has been carrying out teaching EFL at school started from junior high school. It is stated in Curriculum 2013 that teaching English objectives of junior high school focus on developing students' oral and written communicative competence through functional text, improving students' awareness of the importance of English as an international language, and understanding the relationship between language and culture. Therefore, students hopefully will be able to take part in the development of state and nation and to run the language as international communication.

To know whether those objectives are achieved or not, the government conducts a standardized test namely the national examination to assess students' competency after 3 years of learning English at school. This government policy leads to the system of assessment in every level of class to assess students' proficiency in the language. English national examination consists of 50 multiple choices of questions focusing on language structure and reading comprehension and leaving out listening, speaking, and writing skills. However, those three skills are important to assess students' communicative competence.

Some researches had been conducted regarding the communicative competence of English as a foreign language. Such as in Yufrizal (2017), this study was about finding out and exploring the teachers' and students' perception of communicative competence. It is found that English teachers' perceptions about communicative competence were not significantly different from non-ELT and ELT students. In addition, the other previous study was conducted by Nguyen and Le (2012). This research focused on analyzing the contents of five 45 minutes tests and five end-of-term tests which were given to grade 6 students. Its purpose is to find out whether these contents help measure students' real communicative competence. The results revealed that the test could measure students' language focus but failed to measure their real communicative competence. These researches gave valuable input for conducting research related to communicative competence.

Based on the previous studies above, there is a difference in terms of the treatment to the communicative competence. The first research talked about the perception of communicative competence, and the second research discussed whether school tests measure students' communicative competence or not. However, the previous studies did not discuss how standardized tests such as national examinations at the high school level measure students' communicative competence. As the result, it is interesting to discuss further it because there has been no study investigating how far national examinations assess students' communicative competence.

Therefore, this current study will be limited to a qualitative study concentrating on finding out how national examinations assess the communicative competence of EFL learners in Indonesia. This study carries out a descriptive content analysis as a design. According to S.B Merriam (2015) content analysis is one of the qualitative research methods for studying documents and communication artifacts, which can be text, picture, or video. This study will use a national examination item test as the research source. The items test then will be grouped and analyzed based on categories of communicative competence. Hopefully, the result will give us valuable input about how the national examination assesses students' communicative competence.

In connection with the problems above, this study aims to find out how far national examination meets the principles and features of communicative competence. To achieve this aim, the following question is posed:

1. Does the English national examination assess students' communicative competence of EFL in Indonesia?
2. To what extent does the English national examination meet the principles and features of communicative competence?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study concentrating on finding out how the national examination assesses the communicative competence of EFL learners in Indonesia. This study uses descriptive content analysis as a design. Content analysis is considered as one of the research method that is used to analyze data and interpret its meaning (Schreier, 2012). As a qualitative method, it represents a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena. The data of this study is 50 questions of the English national examination. The questions then will be grouped and analyzed based on categories of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (2017) and recent views of communicative competence. The categories used in this study are linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and action competence. The data presentation and discussion will be presented based on the two raised questions above.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Some interesting findings can be found from the data. Findings are discussed to find out how far the English national examination measure students' communicative competence.

Does the English national examination assess students' communicative competence of EFL in Indonesia?

After doing a content analysis of the questions in the English national examination, the table below presents the percentage of the level of fulfillment of the test toward the five categories of communicative competence.

Table 1. Overall Fulfillment of the Test

Aspect of Communicative Competence	Question	Percentage
Linguistic Competence	5, 8, 12, 15, 19, 23, 27, 31, 45, 48 (10)	20%
Sociolinguistic Competence	43 (1)	2%
Discourse Competence	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 46, 47, 49, 50 (39)	78%
Strategic Competence	(0)	0%
Action Competence	(0)	0%

Table 1 shows that the English national examination gained 78% at the level of fulfillment towards the criterion of discourse competence. The questions of discourse competence are mostly asking about students' understanding of the content of discourse which is stated or implied in several text genres such as invitation, notice, letter, announcement, advertisement, descriptive text, recount text, narrative text, and report text. This means that the content of the English national examination mostly measures students' competency to utilize the standards and shows of consolidating syntactic structures and implications to accomplish bound together spoken and composed texts in various types (Al-Mashaqba, 2017). It is in line with Furko and Monos (2013) statement that discourse rules decide the manners in which that language structures are consolidated to create brought together, cognizant texts in various modes in talking and composing.

English national examination, moreover, also obtained 20% at the level of fulfillment towards the criterion of linguistic competence. In other words, the English national examination measure students' mastery of language code knowledge. It includes knowledge of phonology, orthography, vocabulary, word formation, and sentence formation English language which allows learners to use them to improve his/her linguistic competence (Yufrizal, 2017). However, in the English national examination, not all of the knowledge in linguistic competence is measured. In this case, junior high

school students are only tested at lexicon level which talks about word and vocabulary mastery which is usually in a form of finding synonyms of words.

In addition, the data gathered from the analysis shows that the English national examination covers only 2% of the criterion of sociolinguistic competence. The question focuses on measuring students' knowledge of sociocultural factors such as norms which implied in the recount text. This type of question helps students find the moral values within the text which can be adopted from the everyday situation. By having this question, students are asked to be aware of their environment and values that emerge in their cultures. It is supported by Kourova and Modianos (2013) argument that students are frequently approached to consider viewpoints identified with their own way of life and the objective culture as they check out contrasts and similitudes and investigate regions that are regularly underestimated. This ability includes raising the student's familiarity with their own way of life just as bringing issues to light of the way of life of the language being learned.

Based on the analysis, the questions of the English national examination can be categorized into seven genres which are classified based on the three communicative competencies above. The first genre of questions was found to measure students' competency in finding synonym from text which includes linguistic competence. For instance, question number five – *"the 5th annual students' art exhibition." The underlined word is closest in meaning to..* ". From the content of this question, it is clearly stated that the word *annual* is the focus that students have to find the closest or synonym meaning to that word.

In this case, students are assessed on their grammatical competence by focusing on finding the word synonym. According to Michael et.al that grammatical competence covers knowledge of phonology, orthography, vocabulary, word formation, and sentence formation (Sharifian, 2013). This aspect is also in line with the English national examination lattice which is stated that students need to identify the substance of language which related to the text that includes synonym, word order, pronoun, tenses, etc. (BSNP, 2017, p. 3). Hence, this model of question theoretically assesses students' communicative competence in grammatical aspect in particular because finding synonyms can enable students to use their level of cognitive aspect and also widen students' vocabulary mastery. Widhiarso and Haryanta (2015) argue that students will need knowledge of vocabulary to successfully take the synonym test, and this test was purposely made to measure vocabulary mastery in breadth.

The second genre of question tends to measure students' ability in finding pronoun references from the text. This genre also includes linguistic competence. Question number twenty-three which stated: *"... making it Western European's tallest building." What does the underlined word refer to?* The question is asking students to find the reference of *it*. In this case, hence, students' grammatical ability is underlined and tested in such a question.

In general, this aspect is similar to the first genre, however, the focus is on testing students' grammatical competence to find the pronoun reference. Linguistic competence which includes the grammar aspect is needed to be taught to achieve students' communicative competence (Prasetyo, 2015). Moreover, Chang (2011) argues that by teaching grammar to students, they will gain accuracy in producing the sentence, and it will assist them to achieve communicative competence more accurate. Hence, the emergence of two genres of grammatical competence above, proves that English national examination assesses students' communicative competence, even though in the little scope of communicative competence aspect.

The following genre comes from sociolinguistic competence which asks students to find a moral value which implied from the text. The example of this genre can be obtained from question number forty-three, which is stated that – *"What can you learn from the text? Andi should have...."* From this question, it can be analyzed that students' sense of sociolinguistic is tested. The question above asks students to find the moral value that commonly occurs in the context of normal conditions and situations in a certain place. In this case, through this kind of question, students will be tested on their understanding and awareness of the values and norms in their environment. According to Chowdhury (2016), moral refers to human behavior where morality is emphasized whether the values are linked to beliefs and attitudes and guide human behavior. Hence, understanding values and norms are such competence that students need to interact properly in social interaction.

One aspect seen in this question is the norm that commonly exists in society. According to Messerhi (2017) that sociolinguistic competence is part of communicative competence which

emphasizes students' ability to use the appropriate target language in the various social context, and it deals with politeness, social relations, and norm of speaking. Based on table 1, sociolinguistic competence only emerged in one number which has 2% of all questions. It shows that teaching sociolinguistic competence might be not an easy task to do by the teachers in the classroom. Mede and Dikilitas (2015) argue that students are easier to learn and use grammar effectively and accurately rather than how to convey the social meaning of the target language appropriately. Therefore, it is reasonable that government does not pay much attention to this aspect considering the difficulty of its teaching, but still, it includes in the national exam to assess students' communicative competence in more comprehensive.

The next genre was intended to measure discourse competence which asks students to find purpose and the writer's intention of the text. Question number twenty-six was found to be part of this genre, it is stated that "*What was the writer's intention when he decided to join his first marathon?*" It can be seen that the question focuses on measuring students' understanding of the content of discourse in the text. From the type of question above, it can be seen that the question asks students awareness and understanding of someone's intention or meaning. Understanding people's intention competence is crucial in daily life with verbal action and this competence is part of social cognition. Morgan et.al (2017) clearly states that social cognition incorporates deciphering human collaboration, drawing deductions from spoken and implicit correspondence, and understanding the collective vibes. Therefore, even though in written expression, students need to achieve this competence comprehensively to avoid misunderstanding when they interact with abroad people.

The fifth genre was found to assess students' in finding detailed information stated in the text. One of the examples of this genre is in question number twenty-nine: "*What should we put in the media URL?*". This type of question focuses on measuring students' understanding of the content of discourse stated in the text. The fourth and fifth genre questions were made to assess students' reading comprehension because students need to understand the content of the passage for answering the questions. In this case, Kaya (2015) is convinced that reading skill is required to enhance reading comprehension ability. Therefore, the form of the question in the fourth and fifth genres can be seen as a reading test. This kind of question doesn't need a deeper analysis of the passage, because commonly, the answers are stated in the text.

The sixth genre tends to measure students' discourse competence by asking them to interpret implied information in the text. This genre of questions was found in question number thirty-nine: "*The information text above mainly is important for...*". This question asks students to understand the discourse as a whole and find whether the text is important for several groups of readers or not. This kind of question can enable students to gain their critical thinking through understanding the passage. This genre is still a kind of reading comprehension test. In doing a reading comprehension test, according to Parr (2013), students need to possess several critical strategies such as prior knowledge, identifying the main idea, and summarizing. Therefore, through this test, the student will use their critical strategies to predict and interpret the question beyond the text which is related to a common event.

The last genre of questions is asking students to infer certain meanings from the text. This question was shown in number fifty: "*May the high goals and ideals which led to this special honor continue to inspire you in the years ahead. We can infer from this statement that the writer hopes Davish....*" This kind of question is categorized as discourse competence because it measures students' understanding and interpretation of the content of discourse implied in the text. This level of question uses higher competence that is inferring or interpreting the condition which is stated in the text. By conducting this kind of test, students will at least gain their logical analysis. Jing Ma (2013) argues that to do interpretation and interpreters (students) can use several ways of logical analysis such as cognitive analysis and condition analysis to get the appropriate message from the speakers (texts). Therefore, this type of question will assess students' cognitive and critical analysis of the text presented.

The last four genres belong to discourse competence. As revealed from the English national exam analysis, discourse analysis has dominant in number. There are thirty-nine questions that cover 78% of the total amount in the national exam. As stated by Masduki (2015) that discourse competence is one element of communicative competence which refers to the strategy to mobilize the utterances or

discourses in the context of real communication to create meaning in communication. According to Januin and Stephen (2015) that discourse competence deals with students' mastery of understanding and producing text in various modes such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing which derived from the mastery of comprehensive grammar. Therefore, these four genres are still assessing students' communicative competence through measuring students' discourse competence. It means that the design of the English national examination only measures part of communicative competence.

In this case, students are assessed through reading text. Students understanding of passage intention is the main focus in this competence. It becomes dominant because the approach of English teaching in Indonesia is based on genre text (Tartila, Yasin, and Rozimela, 2013). Students learn English through studying various texts which cover many other language aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, sociolinguistic aspect and etc. (Dirgeyasa, 2016). In this case, the design of English national examination was designed to assess students' communicative competence in limited aspects especially in written and reading tests, excluding the speaking and listening tests.

As far as open capability definition, the primary goal of learning English as an unknown dialect is to empower understudies to impart in the objective language and national examinations were used to examine whether students can achieve the learning objectives or not. Regarding the result above, it seems that the English national examination has not fully measured the communicative competence of the learners. The data showed that two main categories are often shown in the test, discourse competence (78%), linguistic competence (20%) and the last 2 % is sociolinguistic competence. However, from the above-mentioned percentage of fulfillment, there are still 2 categories unfulfilled by the test such as strategic competence and action competence. Moreover, the English national examination does not measure all of the students' language skills. It only tests students' reading skill, whether the other three skills such as speaking, writing, and listening are left behind.

To what extent does the English national examination meets the principles and features of communicative competence?

Ellisafni (2013) proposes that informative ability alludes to the connection between syntactic capability, information on the principles of punctuation, and sociolinguistic skill or information on the standards of language use. Many linguists such as Chomsky, Hymes, Canale, and Swain (J Light and McNaughton, 2014) agree that the aspect of grammatical competence is a big part of communicative competence. However, in this case, grammar is not the only aspect that built communicative competence. It needs the concepts or the rules on how to use the grammar appropriately based on the context intended, which we call sociolinguistic competence.

Sociolinguistic competence focus on the fittingness of open demonstrations and the effortlessness of discourse inside given socio-social settings (for example kinesics, proxemics, and prosodic) and utilizing paralinguistic correspondence (signals and copy impacts), and the principles of union - the connecting of expressions - and intelligence - the intelligent sequencing of thoughts (Farooq, 2015). By mastering this competency, students will be able to produce appropriate grammatical utterances based on social contexts that occur on daily basis. Genesee et.al (2014) also stated that a significant part of the open skill of capable bilinguals is the capacity to utilize every one of their dialects differentially and suitably as indicated by important qualities of their questioners and informative circumstances. However, this competency is still assessed minimally in national examinations. This might be led to the lack of sociolinguistic components in national examination.

In linguistic competence, five aspects contain various sub-aspects of linguistic features in the English language. However, the English national examination only fulfilled the view part of it. For example, in linguistic competence, the students were only tested in lexicon level which talks about word and vocabulary mastery which is usually in a form of finding synonyms of words. There is a lot of aspects that can be measured in linguistic competence such as syntax, morphology, lexicon, or even phonology. Additionally, if we take a look in the syllabus of English in Junior High School, they also have learned about several tenses and speech-act such as statements, negatives, questions, imperatives, exclamations, and so on (BSNP, 2017, p. 26). Unfortunately, it was not tested on the national examination.

As also purposed by Ribakova, L. A. et.al (2015), communicative competence is related to communicative performance which deals with the competencies of interaction in actual production and comprehension of utterances. Hence, actually, to be the more comprehensive test, the communicative competence assessment should cover all aspects of language such as the skills, component, and strategy. This type of element promotes the competency of strategic and action competence. Strategic competence incorporates two communicative components: planning and execution (Le and Chang, 2013). The arranging part recovers the important things from semantic skill and defines an arrangement for understanding the informative objective. The execution part attracts on psychophysiological systems to carry out the arrangement in a methodology (open/useful) and channel (general media) that is suitable to the correspondence objective and setting.

This result might be also shown because the English national examination does not cover all of the language skills (Saukah, and Cahyono, 2015). Language skills consist of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. These skills were taught in the class during the academic year. Based on the 2013 Curriculum, Junior High School students are expected to be able to master four language skills; they are listening, reading, writing, and speaking. It is stated in the curriculum that teaching English objectives of junior high school focus on developing students' oral and written communicative competence through functional text, improving students' awareness of the importance of English as an international language, and understanding the relationship between language and culture. Therefore, students hopefully will be able to take part in the development of state and nation and to run the language as international communication. Unfortunately, listening, speaking, and writing as the main skills of language are not tested in the English national examination. Therefore, it can be inferred that the English national examination is not designed to measure students' communicative competence considering that most aspects of communicative competence are left out.

In the context of EFL teaching in Indonesia, as explained in the previous chapter that the model of ELT in Indonesia is using genre-based text (Tartila, Yasin, and Rozimela, 2013). Therefore, it is no surprise that the content of the English national examination is dominated on understanding the text which more focus on discourse competence. However, if we analyze more detail on the syllabus used, it will be found that there are more materials are taught such as conversation, grammar, and listening competence. Hence, based on this case, actually, the English national examination still needs to be reviewed and revised based on the content to be a more holistic assessment that assesses students' language competence more comprehensively. Language appraisal or testing is a significant stage during the time spent language instructing and learning as it should assist with checking understudies' instructive advance and assess the nature of educational systems (Fulcher and Davidson, 2007). It is in line to what Muntholi'ah's (2013) statement that a good test should consist of at least four aspects that are design, development, utilization, and management. Therefore, through these aspects, the English national examination is expected to be better and meaningful which assesses students' competence comprehensively. The previously mentioned open parts blend with one another to frame information on a language and the capacity to utilize it. In this way, discover an appropriate kind of test that can quantify one of the four parts to have the option to survey students' genuinely open capability.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study is an attempt to find out whether the English National Examination assesses students' communicative competence of EFL in Indonesia or not. Communicative competence is considered as competence expected to be achieved by language learners which include grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and action competence. This study used items to test in English national examination in 2017 as the data. All the data were qualitatively analyzed using the concept of content analysis in terms of the availability of five criteria of communicative competence in the English national examination. The questions were grouped into five categories of communicative competence. The data shows that the English national examination measured three categories of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain. According to the result, there are two main categories which often showed in the test, discourse competence (78%), linguistic competence (20%) and the last 2 % is sociolinguistic competence.

However, from the above-mentioned percentage of fulfillment, there are still 2 categories unfulfilled by the test such as strategic competence and action competence.

Based on the evidence currently available, it seems fair to suggest that the English national examination is less successful to assess students' communicative competence comprehensively because it has not fulfilled all the five categories of communicative competence in total. English national examination focused only half of the categories in communicative competence whereas the English national examination is designed to measure students' competency of the English language. This result might be shown because the English national examination does not cover all of the language skills such as listening and speaking which become two basic skills in communicative competence. Therefore, it can be inferred that the English national examination is not designed to measure students' communicative competence considering that most aspects of communicative competence are left out. Hence, in determining the evaluation process, it is necessary to consider those aspects to create a test that can assess students' achievement comprehensively.

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