Students' English Proficiency: The Case of One Madrasah in Jambi City

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Abstract

This present study aimed to find out the senior high school students' English proficiency. The study employed descriptive quantitative design. It took place at Madrasah Aliyah Labor Kota Jambi. There were 104 students of Madrasah Aliyah Labor purposefully selected in the study. The data were collected through English proficiency test for basic users namely Key English Test (KET). Descriptive statistics was employed to analyze the data. The result of this study revealed that four students (3.8%) were categorized as beginners (level A1) while the rest (96.2%) were not included in the entry level of Common European of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as their scores were lower than those of the beginner level. Moreover, based on the result of reading and writing test in KET analyzed by using the criteria used at school, the students scored low in both sessions.

Keywords: English proficiency, key English test, madrasah

Introduction

English has been widely used by people all over the world. As mentioned by The Economist (2001), most of the world has been influenced by this global language (Spicer-Escalante & Jonge-Kannan, 2014). It is used in various contexts, not only by native speakers but also speakers of other languages. English is used as major language of the United Nations and NATO, the official language of international aviation; unofficial first language of international sport, radio broadcast, writing mail, fast developing technology, films, scientific research and its literature (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003). In Indonesia, English is the most favored foreign language. Due to its significance, Indonesian government has made it a compulsory subject in secondary schools and tertiary education. Alwasilah (2001) asserts that English should be a part of curriculum as this language can support the development of Indonesian generation. Based on Curriculum 2013, there are three objectives of English subject in senior high school. First, the students are able to develop the competence in the informational literacy level. Second, the students are aware of the essence and significance of English to enhance the competitiveness in global society. Lastly, the students are able to develop understanding on the relation between language and culture (Kemendikbud, 2013).

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Referring to the objectives of English subject in senior high school, the students must have basic communication skills as they have acquired English for more than 3 years. However, senior high school students' English proficiency is still low. Based on the survey conducted by international education company, English First (EF), in 2016, Indonesia scored 52.91 and was ranked 32th of 72 participating countries. Steve Crooks, the director of Education Research and Development in EF, said that Indonesia scored lower than the neighboring countries in regional area (Adiwijaya, 2016). Another survey on English proficiency has been regularly conducted by PISA (Program for International Student Assessment). Unlike the survey conducted by English First, PISA only focuses on reading comprehension. The result of survey in 2015 showed that Indonesia reading mean score was 397, under OECD average which was 493. Indonesia was ranked 64th of 70 participating countries (OECD, 2016). This result suggested that Indonesian students are at risk for low English proficiency.

The results of aforementioned studies indicated that students had not attained English learning objectives as stated in curriculum. It is essential for the educators and practitioners to ensure students' language proficiency prior to the instruction. The students need to be assessed by using international language standard in order to get more comprehensive information of students' English proficiency. Once the students' proficiency is measured, English learning objectives are more likely to attain. One of international language standards which is used to measure EFL proficiency is CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Language). CEFR describes the language proficiency that is divided into 6 levels starting from A1 for beginner to C2 for advanced students.

The findings of previous studies discuss students' English proficiency without exposing the level of students' English proficiency and students' productive skill. The present study investigated students' English proficiency level at one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia. The following research questions guided this study: How is students' English proficiency based on CEFR? How is students' reading comprehension? And how is students' writing competence?

Literature Review

The concept of CEFR

CEFR was firstly used as a guidance to describe the attainment of foreign language learner in Europe. Fauziah (2012) mentions that CEFR was arranged by Council of Europe as a part of project "Language Learning to European Citizenship" in 1989 to 1996, aimed to provide assessment method and instruction that could be applied to all languages in Europe. CEFR consists of a descriptive scheme and six reference levels of language proficiency such as A1 (beginner), A2 (elementary), B1 (intermediate), B2 (upper intermediate), C1 (advanced) and C2 (proficient) (Little, 2007). In addition to its primary use as the standard in measuring foreign language learner's proficiency level, CEFR has some other benefits. CEFR can be used to design more transparent foreign language instruction in international level and it can be used in foreign language instruction in multilingual society. Therefore, Indonesia as multilingual country can use CEFR (Fauziah, 2012). Several studies concerning the implementation of CEFR have been conducted. In Indonesia, most of researches highlighted the implementation of CEFR for designing teaching module of BIPA (Indonesian for foreign speakers. For instance, a study conducted by Dewi (2016), CEFR was used to design teaching module of BIPA at the beginner level.

The result of the research revealed that CEFR based BIPA teaching module for beginner level was proper to be used in the instruction of BIPA class of KBRI Moscow. Another study was carried out by Won and Kang (2014) investigating the problems and implications in implementing of the CEFR. In the study, they found three challenges in implementing CEFR. First, the objective of foreign language instruction in Korea was different from the perspective of CEFR in that the first and most important objective of Korean instruction was acquiring the proficiency certificate to develop a learner's foreign language proficiency. Second, a lot of educational experts and government officers who designed and promoted language policy have not seen the importance of CEFR. Also, teachers scarcely concerned themselves with the current method and assessment system. Last of all, it is not easy to implement the latest assessment system without striving for professionals though the newest method and assessment system were introduced at the first place. There are many others study concerning with the implementation of CEFR in foreign language instruction, but a few studies stress on students' foreign language proficiency based on CEFR.

Methodology

Research design

In this study, we employed descriptive quantitative approach. The descriptive quantitative was used in order to get the data of students' English proficiency through the use of English test. Descriptive quantitative research is a kind of research which measures the participants at once in order to provide a descriptive account or to establish a relationship between variables (Simion, 2016). This study was conducted to find out the value of one variable without comparing to another variable.

Research sites and participants

The research took place at Madrasah Aliyah Labor Jambi. We carried out the study at Madrasah Aliyah Labor because it is an educational institution under the auspices of Islamic State University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi. In addition, Madrasah Aliyah Labor is a school where the students have not been exposed to any standardized English test. We wanted to find out the students' English proficiency by using the international language standard Key English Test. In selecting the sample of study, we used purposive sampling. There were 104 students of Madrasah Aliyah Labor Jambi recruited in the study. All of those students were the second grade students. We did not involve the first and the third grade students for some considerations. First, most of the first grade students were assigned by school to participate in extracurricular activities at the time of the research. Second, the third grade students could not get involved in the study because they took national exam. They had to prepare themselves for the test.

Data collection and analysis

We used an English test to get the data. The English test given to the participants was Key English Test (KET). It is an assessment of Cambridge English proficiency designed to figure out the English proficiency in the basic level. This test measures four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Of those four skills in KET, only two skills (reading and writing) were used in the study. There are fifty five multiple choice questions and one form filling question in the test. The reading comprehension test consisted of 35 questions while writing skill consisted of 21 questions. The test had 9 parts. Reading consisted of five parts and writing consisted of four parts. The students were given 70 minutes to complete the test. Even though there were only two skills used in the study, reading and writing parts were worth 50% of the total score for the exam which means that if the students failed in those two parts, the other two parts (listening and speaking) would not help them to pass the test. Before the test was given to the participants, we put the test into trial in order to find out the validity and reliability of the test. The result of the try out showed that the reliability was 0.92 which was higher than the rule of thumb, suggesting that the instrument was valid and reliable to be used. The number of correct answers that the students got would determine the level of their English proficiency based on CEFR. For the first to fifty five questions, the students were given one point for each correct answer. Meanwhile, the point that was given in form filling question ranged from 0 to 5. Therefore, the highest score would be 60.

The conversion of KET assessment based on CEFR (Cambridge English Language Assessment) is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Scoring System of CEFR

Practice test score	CEFR Level
55	Level B1(Intermediate)
40	Level A2 (Elementary)
25	Level A1(Beginner)
13	-

Based on the table above, the level of students' language proficiency can be categorized as the students answer 25 questions correctly. The students are not in any CEFR level if the correct answers are fewer than 25. The data were analyzed through the use of SPSS program. The descriptive statistics analysis was employed to analyze the data. Descriptive method is a method used to analyze the data by describing the data gathered as they are (Sugiyono, 2005). Through this method, the researcher gave score, made the table or the distribution of frequency and computed the central tendency (mean).

Findings

Students' English proficiency level based on CEFR

One hundred and four students participated in the study. The descriptive statistical analysis of students' English proficiency demonstrated that the maximum score was 34 and the

minimum score was 3. The mean score was 14.5. The following figure is the distribution of students' practice score.
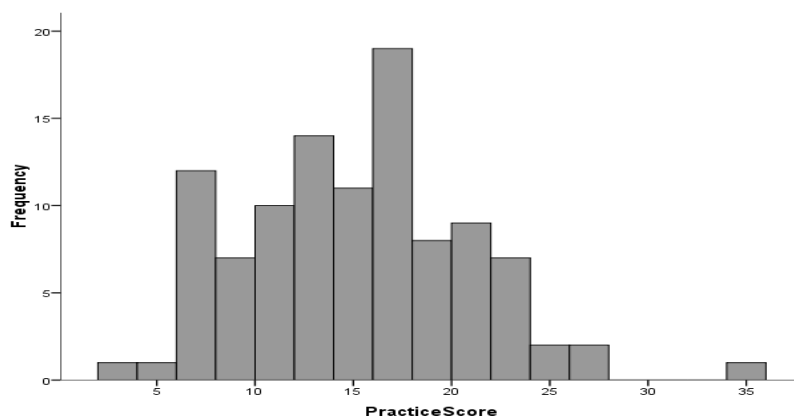

Figure 1.The Distribution of Students' Practice Score

In figure 1, it shows that there was one student got 34. Two students had 27 correct answers. One student got 25. There were twelve students who got 16 correct answers, nine students could answer 14 questions correctly and eight students had 20 correct answers. There were also some students whose score was lower than 10. From the individual's score the students got in KET, the level of students' English proficiency is as follows,

Table 2. Students' English Proficiency Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A1	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
	No Entry	100	96.2	96.2	100.0
	Total	104	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 demonstrates that four students (3.8%) were in level A1 (beginner). The other one hundred students (96.2%) were not in any entry level of CEFR as their scores were lower than those of the beginner level.

Students' Reading Comprehension

Students' reading comprehension was analyzed by referring to scoring system at school. The criteria used were A (Excellent), B (Good), C (Average), and D (Poor). Descriptive

statistical analysis showed that the maximum score was 54 and the minimum score was 9. The reading comprehensions mean score was 30.
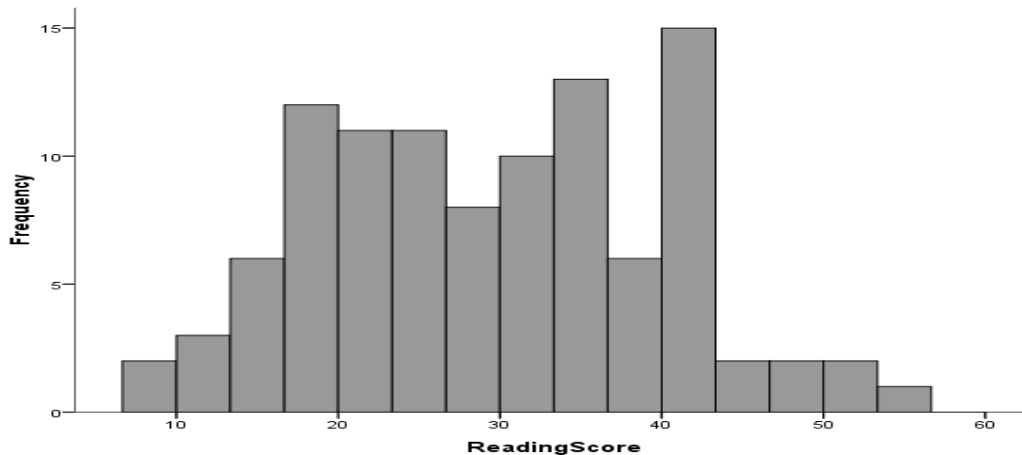

Figure 2. The result of reading score

The reading score shown in figure 2 suggested that the students' reading comprehension was poor. The students' scores only ranged from 9 to 54. There were thirteen students who got 34. There were two students who got the lowest score. This result indicated that the students could not deal with the simple discourse in KET.

Students' writing competence

In writing section, there were four parts that the participants had to complete. Based on the result of descriptive statistical analysis, it was found that the maximum score was 60 and the minimum score was 0. The mean writing score was 16.76.
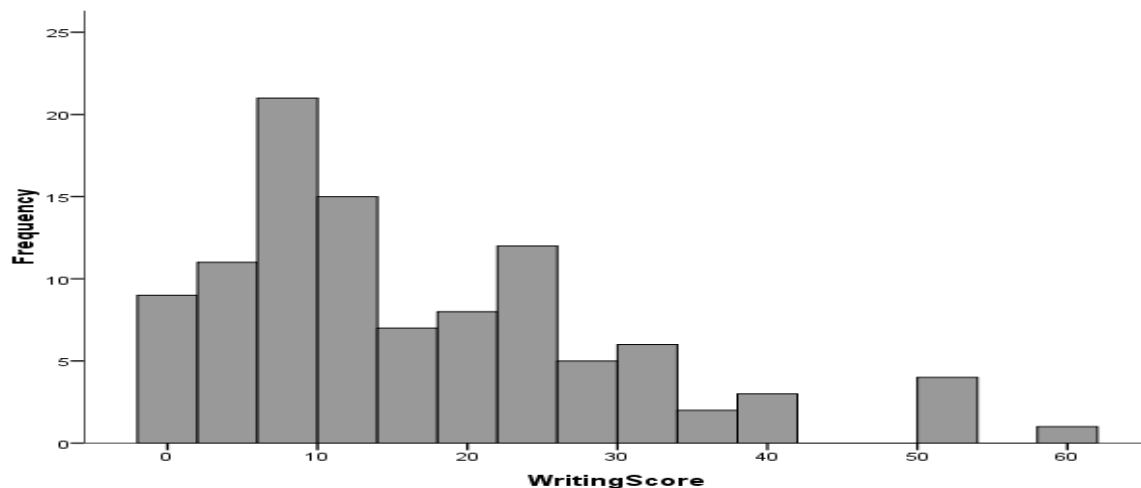

Figure 3. The result of writing test

Figure 3 demonstrates that students writing score was poor with the mean score 16.76. There was only one student whose writing score was categorized average. There were nine students who got 0.

Discussion

This descriptive quantitative study aimed to find out students' English proficiency at one senior high school in Jambi. The research questions guided this study are: How was the students' English proficiency level based on CEFR? How was students' reading comprehension? And how was the students' writing competence. The researcher found that most of participants were not at any entry level of CEFR. Their scores were lower than those of the beginner or basic level of English. There were only four students who were at the beginner level (A1). The result of the current study is congruent with what Lie (2007) has stated in her study that high school and university graduates had low English competence in spite of the six years English instruction. According to Permadi (2017), the low English proficiency indicated that Indonesian society was only able to understand the simple English talks such as greetings ('good morning' and 'how are you?') and partings. It means that doing a negotiation, mediation and discussion are still unattainable.

In addition, the result of reading comprehension test of KET suggested that students' reading comprehension was poor. The reading mean score was 30. The result indicated that students were still struggling with the basic level questions. The students had not attained the English learning objectives as stated in curriculum that the students had the ability to develop their competence in literal informational level. Wells (1987) asserts that in informational level, an individual is able to access knowledge through his language proficiency. The result of reading comprehension of this study confirmed the result of study conducted by PISA in 2015 in which Indonesian students, aged 15, got 350 point in reading (OECD, 2016), and were at 69th rank of 76 participating countries.

Based on the result of writing analysis, the students' writing competence was also poor. There was only one student who was at the moderate level. This result implied that the participants had no clue to write simple and short messages in basic level. Also, it confirmed that among other skills, writing is the most difficult skill to acquire (Harmer, 2004; Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study investigated the senior high school students' English proficiency level through the use of international language standard, CEFR. Based on the results of study, we found that most of the participants were not at the any entry level of CEFR. Their scores were below the beginner level. There were only four students of one hundred participants who were at the basic level. Based on the result of reading and writing test, the students' scores were poor. In writing test, there was one student whose score was at the moderate level. The study was not without limitations. It is recommended for the further studies to use larger samples in order to get the comprehensive and representative result. Also, we recommend the next researchers to do the follow up research either to use CEFR in English instruction or to develop materials that suit to students' English proficiency level.

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