

IMPROVING READING SKILLS FOR THE UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAMINATION FOR STUDENTS OF VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL PELITA BANDUNG

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Abstract

This article discusses the results of a community service initiative carried out at Vocational High School Pelita Bandung, emphasizing its impact on students' academic performance and motivation in the Reading subject for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The research investigated two main facets: students' perceptions of the examination, encompassing their attitudes, the content, the methodology, the course structure, and preparation, as well as their self-reported levels of motivation. Data were gathered through classroom observations and a questionnaire administered to 63 students across four proficiency levels. The findings suggest that students have indicated a favorable effect on their learning and motivation, implying that the program is appropriate for evaluating achievement goals. Nevertheless, high-stakes testing continues to raise concerns regarding adequate preparation. Concerning motivation, which encompasses content, methodology, and attitude, the results indicate a favorable outlook that promotes students' growth and enhances their test performance.

Keywords: Reading Skills, EFL Learners, Learning Motivation, High-Stakes Testing, Vocational High School Pelita Bandung

INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in English is essential for students' academic achievement, especially for those preparing to pursue higher education. A commonly used tool for assessing English proficiency is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which evaluates the ability of non-native English speakers to use and comprehend English in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a university classroom (Nugraha, 2023). Therefore, strengthening reading skills is essential for students who will face university entrance examinations, especially vocational high school students who require adequate preparation to compete academically and comprehend various English texts used in academic assessments.

English examinations are widely used in schools and higher education institutions to assess students' progress. Governments frequently use these assessments to rate school quality and inform educational reforms. Despite these intended benefits, many individuals perceive

such tests negatively due to the anxiety and self-doubt they induce (Brown, 2010). Over several decades, these examinations have generated debate among researchers and policymakers regarding appropriate graduation standards.

This phenomenon, often referred to by linguists as the influence of testing on teaching and learning, denotes the effect that testing has on both teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hughes, 2020; Messick, 1996). The influence of assessment on educational practices profoundly shapes how students prepare for tests in the classroom, and studies suggest it can have both beneficial and detrimental effects. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), the beneficial influence of assessment on educational practices is characterized by the congruence between assessment and language acquisition that meets students' needs and enhances their motivation. The beneficial effects of assessment on education significantly boost the motivation of both educators and learners, thus facilitating more efficient language acquisition (Green, 2013).

Conversely, Alderson and Wall (1993) characterize the detrimental effects of testing on both teaching and learning as the adverse consequences stemming from an insufficient test in these situations. The comprehensive effect of assessment on both teaching and learning, whether beneficial or detrimental, is influenced by a range of stakeholders involved in language programs. These stakeholders include test-takers, educators, administrators, course designers, and developers of instructional materials (Bailey, 1999). In Indonesia, the government conducts an annual National Examination for students in their final year of schooling as a standardized assessment.

The National Examination is regarded as a reliable method for assessing students' capabilities. Nevertheless, the context surrounding the high-stakes English National Examination (ENE), as highlighted by various researchers, indicates that the detrimental effects of testing on both teaching and learning outweigh its benefits (Afrianto, 2009; Aprianto, 2013; Sukyadi & Mardiani, 2011). These investigations revealed adverse psychological impacts that lead to a lack of motivation, stress, and anxiety among both teachers and students. Consequently, they often concentrate less on the overall process of acquiring a language. The impact of language assessments extends to students' long-term educational outcomes. Students who exhibit greater motivation generally achieve superior outcomes in acquiring a second language (Canale & Swain, 1980), thereby enhancing teachers' confidence in maintaining and evolving effective instructional methods. Motivation is a fundamental human trait in which personal desire drives actions aimed at fulfilling specific objectives and achieving satisfaction. Achieving proficiency in a second language requires a strong motivation to acquire diverse skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, reading is widely considered one of the most vital components in the instruction of English as a foreign language. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that reading ability is crucial for vocabulary acquisition and can significantly improve vocabulary, spelling, and writing competencies. Since these skills are frequently assessed in Indonesia, they are necessarily included in students' materials and textbooks, which are predominantly written. In the realm of education, while a majority of Indonesian students complete English courses, many continue to encounter difficulties when taking university entrance examinations and international language assessments, both of which are generally considered high-stakes. These challenges underscore the need to conduct a study

investigating the effects of testing on both teaching and learning by analyzing how these assessments affect students' motivation to learn English.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This section outlines the method for implementing a training program to improve students' reading skills at Vocational High School Pelita Bandung. The approach consists of several stages designed to achieve the objectives established for this community service activity (Fetters, M.D., Curry, L.A., & Creswell, 2013). The training uses a collaborative learning methodology that combines specific reading techniques with collaborative strategies (Wahyuni, N., Idhar, I., & Bulan, 2022).

This approach was chosen for its proven ability to enhance students' active involvement and engagement in the educational process (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Collaborative learning promotes active engagement between students and educators, thereby enhancing learning effectiveness through organized discussions and cooperative efforts (Gokhale, 1995).

The following delineates the series of activities involved in the training program:

1. Initial Preparation:
 - a. Defining training objectives and collecting pertinent reading and learning resources.
 - b. Choosing the reading strategies that will be employed during the training.
2. Training Implementation:
 - a. Engaging in collaborative learning sessions that utilize reading strategies to enhance reading abilities.
 - b. Creating working groups for joint discussions and activities.
3. Evaluation and Discussion:
 - a. Assessing students' advancement in applying reading strategies to enhance their reading skills.
 - b. Conducting reflective discussions to assess the efficacy of the reading strategies.

The community service initiative took place on February 6, 2026, at Vocational High School Pelita Bandung, located at Jl. Sekejati No. 9, Cikutra, Cibeunying Kidul, Sukapada, Cibeunying Kidul District, Bandung City, West Java 40124. By adhering to this process, the collaborative learning method supported by reading strategies is expected to significantly enhance students' proficiency in applying reading strategies at Vocational High School Pelita Bandung, Pelita Bandung.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This formal psychometric evaluation analyzes data from 63 participants at Vocational High School Pelita Bandung to determine the internal perceived validity of the English scholastic training modules and identify areas requiring pedagogical remediation. The cohort is comprised of Grade XII students across various technical and vocational disciplines, including software engineering, business and marketing, office administration, and the technical sectors of automotive and motorcycle engineering.

The analysis utilizes a 5-point Likert scale to assess central tendencies and sentiment distribution across nine key training indicators.

Table 1: Metric Components

Metric	Detail
Total Sample Size (N)	63 Participants
Target Population	Grade XII Students, Vocational High School Pelita Bandung
Categorical Scale	Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Statement: *"I believe that special strategy training can improve my ability to do English scholastic problems."*

Table 2: Question 1 Confidence in Strategy Training

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	23	36.5%
Agree	23	36.5%
Neutral	16	25.4%
Disagree	1	1.6%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

The initial score distribution reflects a strong positive skew, indicating a high baseline of trust in the efficacy of the training. With 73.0% of students expressing confidence before the conclusion of the program, there is clear evidence of high student "buy-in," which is a critical precursor for successful cognitive skill acquisition.

Statement: *"The training materials (e.g. speed-reading techniques, answering strategies, time management) are relevant to English scholastic questions."*

Table 3: Question 2 Relevance of Training Materials

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	9	14.3%
Agree	22	34.9%
Neutral	28	44.4%
Disagree	4	6.3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

While the positive sentiment remains at 49.2%, the shift toward a neutral central tendency suggests a variance in how students perceive the alignment between specific modules such as speed reading and the actual exam content. This 44.4% neutrality indicates that the perceived external validity of the materials could be strengthened by more direct exam-to-module mapping.

Statement: *"I feel more confident working on English scholastic questions after attending structured practice sessions."*

Table 4: Question 3 Post-Session Confidence Levels

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	15.9%
Agree	19	30.2%
Neutral	31	49.2%
Disagree	3	4.8%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

The data shows a significant concentration of students (49.2%) in the neutral range regarding post-session self-efficacy. This suggests that while the instructional structure is acknowledged, the translation of that structure into latent student confidence is not yet universal across all technical departments, requiring further longitudinal practice.

Statement: *"The practice questions based on the exam examples and step-by-step explanations helped me understand the question patterns."*

Table 5: Question 4 Analysis: Pattern Recognition and Step-by-Step Methodology

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	14	22.2%
Agree	29	46.0%
Neutral	20	31.7%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

This indicator shows strong pedagogical alignment, with 68.2% of participants reporting successful pattern recognition. The total absence of disagreement (0% Disagree/ Strongly Disagree) suggests that the step-by-step methodology is the most robust instructional component of the program across all student majors.

Statement: *"Teaching vocabulary and key phrases that frequently appear in questions really helped me."*

Table 6: Question 5 Vocabulary and Key Phrase Acquisition

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	15	23.8%
Agree	29	46.0%
Neutral	19	30.2%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

Linguistic scaffolding is highly valued by this cohort, with a combined positive sentiment of 69.8%. The distribution indicates that focused vocabulary acquisition remains a high-priority need for students in vocational tracks to bridge the gap in English scholastic comprehension.

Statement: *"The time management techniques taught enabled me to complete more assignments on time."*

Table 7: Question 6 Time Management Proficiency

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	13	20.6%
Agree	25	39.7%
Neutral	24	38.1%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.6%

The efficiency metrics are largely positive (60.3%), yet the nearly equal split between "Agree" and "Neutral" suggests that time management techniques are perceived as conceptually sound but potentially difficult to execute under simulated test pressures.

Statement: *"Individual feedback sessions (error reviews) helped me improve specific weaknesses."*

Table 8: Question 7 Individual Feedback Effectiveness

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	13	20.6%
Agree	34	54.0%
Neutral	16	25.4%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

This category attained the highest positive sentiment (74.6%) and the highest frequency in the "Agree" category. From an analytical perspective, this highlights personalized error correction as the program's most impactful intervention for driving specific competency improvements.

Statement: *"I am able to apply the strategy of eliminating answer choices when encountering difficult questions."*

Table 9: Question 8 Application of Elimination Strategies

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	7.9%
Agree	16	25.4%
Neutral	37	58.7%
Disagree	4	6.3%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.6%

This section represents the most significant area for pedagogical remediation. The overwhelming neutral response (58.7%) across all majors suggests a systemic instructional gap; students may understand the concept of elimination in theory but lack the tactical confidence to apply it to high-difficulty items.

Statement: *"I am willing to take further training or additional sessions if available to improve my chances of getting into college."*

Table 10: Question 9 Future Training Interest

Category	Frequency (Raw Count)	Percentage
Strongly Agree	16	25.4%
Agree	19	30.2%
Neutral	24	38.1%
Disagree	4	6.3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%

While 55.6% of participants express a willingness to continue, the significant neutral cluster (38.1%) indicates a potential saturation point or a need for more varied motivational incentives to sustain long-term engagement in university preparation. The following table summarizes the "Positive Sentiment" (aggregate of Strongly Agree and Agree) to benchmark the comparative efficacy of each training aspect.

Table 11: Consolidated Sentiment Summary

Training Aspect	Positive Sentiment (Strongly Agree & Agree)
Q7: Individual Feedback Effectiveness	74.6%
Q1: Baseline Confidence in Strategies	73.0%
Q5: Vocabulary & Key Phrase Acquisition	69.8%
Q4: Pattern Recognition/Methodology	68.2%
Q6: Time Management Proficiency	60.3%
Q9: Interest in Future Training	55.6%
Q2: Relevance of Materials	49.2%
Q3: Post-Session Confidence	46.1%
Q8: Application of Elimination Strategies	33.3%

The English scholastic training program at Vocational High School Pelita Bandung demonstrates high internal validity in its individualized feedback and pattern recognition methodologies. However, the data reveals a critical need for tactical remediation regarding answer elimination strategies (Q8), where sentiment remains primarily neutral.

Future iterations of this program should focus on transitioning students from conceptual understanding to tactical application to bolster post-session confidence levels. Overall, the program successfully engaged a diverse cross-section of technical and vocational students, establishing a solid foundation for university admission preparation.



Picture 1. Students of Vocational High School Pelita Bandung



Picture 2. Explanation of reading skill strategies



Picture 3. Explanation of the questionnaire



Picture 4. Students were filling out a questionnaire

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this research is to investigate the effects and motivational factors of a reading assessment conducted as part of the Community Service initiative at a university in Indonesia. Survey findings suggest that students predominantly possess a favorable view of the subject, as the majority of participants indicate that the topic meets their requirements and that the assessment accurately reflects their achievement objectives. Nevertheless, concerns regarding high-stakes testing may adversely influence students' preparation. The test's impact extends to students' attitudes, content engagement, and methodological approaches. In terms of motivation, the test influences students' preparation, and the language-learning process in this subject positively affects their motivation. Questionnaire data address content, methodology, and attitude.

Overall, the findings indicate that a positive attitude plays a significant role in students' development and enhances their test performance. These findings provide additional evidence for the hypothesis that assessment can affect motivation in the learning process. Nonetheless, the current research was confined to a single individual and a small sample size due to time constraints. Future research incorporating additional variables and longitudinal designs is recommended. Such approaches may enrich ongoing inquiries into language assessment.

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