

Perception and Preparation for the English Proficiency Test (EPT) among Aspiring Public Senior High School Teachers

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Abstract

This study discovered the perception and preparation on the English Proficiency Test (EPT) among aspiring public Senior High school (SHS) teachers of Davao City. The descriptive-correlational research design was used through a survey method. There were 30 respondents identified using snowball sampling technique where the researcher relied more on the referrals of the candidates qualified to contribute to the study. Results revealed that in terms of course, majority of the respondents were non-education graduates. In terms of discipline, majority are Science majors. Aspiring public SHS teachers' overall mean for the perception on the EPT showed that they perceived EPT as highly valid, necessary, and fair. The Multivariate Analysis of the General Linear Model revealed that there is no significant difference on the level of perception on the EPT and the level of preparation in terms of course, discipline, EPT rating, and RQA rank respectively. Nevertheless, because of the inferential statistics, the results showed a comparable result because the overall results are not large enough to say that it has no significant difference. Moreover, the perception of the aspiring public SHS teachers especially on the necessity affects their RQA rank. The way they perceive the test has an impact to their test preparation. Furthermore, the Pearson' Product Moment Correlation revealed that there is a significant relationship between the level of perception and the level of preparation as regards to the EPT among aspiring public SHS teachers.

Keywords: English Proficiency Test, Department of Education, Senior High School, Registry of Qualified Applicants, Descriptive-Correlation

Introduction

The use of standardized testing is becoming ubiquitous around the globe to the point that it can influence an individual learning style or even his or her future career. It is undeniable that the demand for language proficiency is increasing. The test for English language proficiency is conducted as part of education and employment requirements in many countries. According to Andrade (2006), English Proficiency influences achievement. According to Othman and Nording (2013) as cited by Zainal Abidin and Jamil (2015) that in order to reinforce the demands of linguistic knowledge it is important to possess a certain level of proficiency in the English language.

In Singapore, aside from basic academic qualifications, teacher applicants are required to take a relevant entrance proficiency test. If their language performance does not meet the minimum required

standards, a language proficiency test will be required to them. The English proficiency of the candidates is a key requirement of the initial teacher preparation (Lowe, 1986). Furthermore, the Sokoto State Government in Nigeria conducts proficiency tests for all teachers working in public schools in the state to boost standards in education (“Sokoto to Conduct Proficiency Test for Teachers”, 2017)). Teachers who do not meet the standards will be redeployed to other sectors befitting of their qualifications and expertise. The tests were to ensure the knowledge base of teachers met the required standards.

Furthermore, in Hong Kong, the key attributes of a teacher are believed to be their values and attitudes. In the survey conducted by Lee (1996) the result showed that primary English teachers in Hong Kong believed that possessing a very good command of English is very essential, but only a few of them thought they possessed this quality. Richards (2017) also believed teachers’ language proficiency is one key to teaching in second language groups. The reality is that teachers, do not need to have a native-like proficiency but to be able to teach using the English language.

The attributes of a test affect test-takers performance (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). In addition, academic background is also a contributory factor. This was emphasized by Pae (2004) who found that test-takers who major Humanities do better on test items related to their field. In contrary, Science majors performed better in test items involving numbers and counting. However, Karami (2012) found no significant relationship between the test and the academic orientation of the test-takers in the University of Tehran EPT. He concluded that there is no association between academic background and the test performance of the test-takes.

In Indonesia, teachers’ competence in the English language both professionally and professionally has been a growing issue (Habibi & Sofwan, 2015). The study of Habibi and Sofwan (2015) where they conducted an English Proficiency Test on Indonesian teachers showed that most of the teachers are not qualified. Among the fifteen participants, only one scored 500, which is considered to them the standard. While those who are non-English majors admitted that, the test was so difficult. The result may not totally represent teachers’ profile and quality but it only shows that there is a need for improvement in their language proficiency.

In the Philippines, the effectiveness of the English Proficiency Training Program among the pre-service teachers at the University of Northern Philippines, Vigan City was explored. There are pre-service teachers who major in English, Mathematics, Filipino, Biological Science, Physical Science, and MAPEH; including also those who major in Elementary education, Early Childhood, Livelihood Education, and Automotive Technology. Patubo (2015) identified areas where pre-service teachers are deficient in language competence. The lack of reinforcement of drills helpful to reinforce grammar, pronunciation, and fluency is seen. Their lack of knowledge and competence in the language is a domino effect on their students. In high regard, the Department of Education in the Philippines releases a memorandum on the hiring guidelines for those who aspire to teach in public schools. Teacher applicants must ensure that they will pass the evaluation process and be included in the Registry of Qualified Applicants (RQA). As per Department of Education Order No.3, s. 2016, “RQA refers to the official list of applicants who obtained an overall score of seventy points and above based on the criteria set and as a result of the evaluation and selection process”. One of the components in the evaluation process is the English Proficiency Test (EPT) which all aspiring teachers are required to take regardless of course and discipline. Moreover, EPT covers ten percent only in the RQA.

In Davao City, as per DepEd Order No.3, s. 2016, aspiring public senior high school teachers are required to undergo the English Proficiency Test as part of the employment process. Some teachers perceive EPT as an easy task, but EPT must be taken seriously, as even some teachers who majored in English also fail. Furthermore, teachers’ standards do matter especially in developing countries (Habibi & Sofwan, 2015).

In relation to the issues faced by the aspiring public SHS teachers in taking the EPT, this study was conducted to discover their perception on and preparation for the English Proficiency Test. Further, it is sought to discover the washback effect of the English Proficiency Test among aspiring public SHS teachers and to call the attention of school administrators and policymakers.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the level of perception on and preparation for the English Proficiency Test among aspiring SHS public teachers. More specifically, it aimed to fulfill the following objectives:

1. Determine the profile of the respondents
2. Identify the level of perception of aspiring public SHS teachers in terms of face validity, necessity, and fairness,
3. Identify the level of preparation of aspiring public SHS teachers in terms of review, coaching, and physical and mental condition,
4. Find out the difference in the perception of EPT among aspiring public SHS teachers according to profile
5. Find out the difference in the preparation of EPT among aspiring public SHS teachers when analyzed by profile
6. Identify the relationship between the perception and preparation on the English Proficiency Test.

Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive-correlational quantitative design, which made use of a survey questionnaire. According to Creswell (2014), this design aims to describe, interpret, examine, and measure the degree of relationship or association among variables. Descriptive-correlation design is applicable to the study because it aimed to determine if there exists a significant difference or relationship between the perception and preparation of the English Proficiency Test among aspiring public senior high school teachers. The respondents of the study were 30 teachers who made into the Registry of Qualified Applicants (RQA) in the year 2017 for Senior High School in Davao City.

The researcher made use of the snowball sampling technique in gathering the respondents. It is a nonprobability sampling technique where respondents recruit other prospects to contribute to the study. Thus, the sample grows like a rolling snowball (Morgan, 2008). The researcher used this technique because the subjects are difficult to locate and referrals give greater certainty of qualified subjects. The researcher spent two weeks in the data gathering process including the administration of the survey questionnaire and the retrieval of the data since the respondents were located in the different places in the city. While majority of the teachers preferred to be visited to their respective workplaces, there were some who opted to be visited at the comfort of their homes.

The research instrument consists the profile of the students to gather data on their course, discipline, EPT rating score, and the SHS strand they applied for. The questionnaire is a researcher-made questionnaire composed of 30 items to measure the level of perception and 30 items to measure the level of preparation for the English Proficiency Test among the aspiring public senior high school teachers. A five-point Likert scale was also used as descriptor 5 for Very High, 4 for High, 3 for Moderate, 2 for Low, and 1 for Very Low. To process the data, the researcher made use of statistical treatments as part of the data analysis process. Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation were utilized to determine the profile of the respondents

in terms of educational qualifications, EPT rating, RQA ranking, and also, to determine their perception on and preparation for the English Proficiency. Multivariate Analysis of the General Linear Model was used to determine if there is a significant difference on the level of perception on the English Proficiency Test among aspiring public SHS teachers in terms of discipline. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). This statistical tool was used to find out if there exists a significant difference between aspiring public SHS teachers' perception and preparation on the EPT. Lastly, the Pearson product moment correlation Coefficient or Pearson r and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). This statistical tool was used to find out if there exists a significant relationship between aspiring public SHS teachers' perception and preparation on the EPT.

Results and Discussion

1. Profile of the Respondents

Table 1
Profile of the Respondents

Profiles	F	Percent	Profiles	F	Percent
Course			EPT Ratings		
BSE	14	46.7	6.83 – 8.00	11	36.7
Others	16	53.3	5.65 – 6.82	8	26.7
Total	30	100	4.47 – 5.64	3	10
			3.29 – 4.46	4	13.3
Discipline			2.11 – 3.28	4	13.3
Science	12	40	Total	30	100
Math	4	13.3			
TLE	3	10	RQA Rank		
English	4	13.3	1 – 16	11	36.6
MAPEH	2	6.7	17 – 32	3	10
Others	5	16.7	33 – 48	6	20
Total	30	100	49 – 64	3	10
			65 – 80	7	23.3
			Total	30	100

In terms of course, 46.7% are from BSE or Bachelor of Secondary Education courses while the 53.3% are non-education graduates. In terms of discipline, majority are Science major teachers. On one hand, 36.7% of the respondents scored 6.83-8.00 ratings in the EPT. Eleven respondents out of thirty also placed the 1st to 16th rank in the RQA.

2. Level of Perception on the English Proficiency Test among Aspiring Public Senior High School Teachers

Teachers perceive the English Proficiency Test as highly valid as it garnered the highest mean of 3.84. In terms of necessity, they also see the test as essential part in the hiring process of SHS teachers with the mean 3.70. They also see the test as fair and non-biased represented by the mean score of 3.81. All indicators are perceived as high by the teachers.

Table 2

Level of Perception on the English Proficiency Test among Aspiring Public Senior High School Teachers

Indicators	Mean	sd	Description
Face Validity	3.84	0.48	High
Necessity	3.70	0.51	High
Fairness	3.81	0.45	High
Overall Average	3.78	0.37	High

3. Level of Preparation for the English Proficiency Test among Aspiring Public Senior High School Teachers

Table 3

Level of Preparation for the English Proficiency Test among Aspiring Public Senior High School Teachers

Indicators	Mean	sd	Description
Review	2.9	0.93	Moderate
Coaching	3.16	0.98	Moderate
Physical and Mental Condition	4.21	0.46	High
Overall Average	3.24	0.66	Moderate

Teachers' preparation on the English Proficiency Test is moderate with a grand mean of 3.42. However, they executed a high preparation for the test in terms of their physical and mental condition with a mean score of 4.21.

4. Significant Difference in the Level of Perception on the English Proficiency Test among Aspiring SHS teachers

Results illustrate that there is no significant difference in the perception on the English Proficiency Test among the aspiring public senior high school teachers. This implies that regardless of their profile, they perceive the EPT requirement being part of the application process as valid, necessary, and fair. However, because of the inferential statistics, the results further show a comparable result because the overall results are not large enough to say that it has no significant difference.

Table 4

Test of Significant Difference in the Level of Perception on the English Proficiency Test among Aspiring SHS teachers

Profile in Terms of Course							
Test of Difference							
Perception	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power	Decision @ 0.05	Interpretation
Face Validity	0.17	0.69	0.01	0.17	0.07	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Necessity	1.61	0.22	0.05	1.61	0.23	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Fairness	0.58	0.45	0.02	0.58	0.11	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Overall Perception	0.19	0.67	0.01	0.19	0.07	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Profile in Terms of Discipline							
Test of Difference							
Perception	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power	Decision @ 0.05	Interpretation
Face Validity	3.94	0.01	0.45	19.68	0.88	Significant	Reject Ho
Necessity	1.14	0.37	0.19	5.68	0.33	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Fairness	2.21	0.09	0.31	11.03	0.61	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Overall Perception	2.31	0.08	0.32	11.53	0.64	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Profile in Terms of EPT rating							
Test of Difference							
Perception	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power	Decision @ 0.05	Interpretation
Face Validity	0.67	0.62	0.10	2.68	0.19	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Necessity	0.40	0.80	0.06	1.62	0.13	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Fairness	2.59	0.06	0.29	10.37	0.64	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Overall Perception	0.69	0.61	0.10	2.75	0.19	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Profile in Terms of RQA Rank							
Test of Difference							
Perception	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power	Decision @ 0.05	Interpretation
Face Validity	0.78	0.55	0.11	3.11	0.21	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Necessity	6.77	0	0.52	27.06	0.98	Significant	Reject Ho
Fairness	1.57	0.21	0.20	6.28	0.41	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Overall Perception	2.96	0.04	0.32	11.85	0.71	Significant	Reject Ho

Results illustrate that there is no significant difference in the perception on the English Proficiency Test among the aspiring public senior high school teachers. This implies that regardless of their profile, they perceive the EPT requirement being part of the application process as valid, necessary, and fair. However, because of the inferential statistics, the results further show a comparable result because the overall results are not large enough to say that it has no significant difference.

5. Significant Difference in the Level of Preparation for the English Proficiency Test among Aspiring Public Senior High School Teachers

Table 5

Test of Significant Difference in the Level of Preparation for the English Proficiency Test among Aspiring Public Senior High School Teachers

Profile in Terms of Course							
Test of Difference							
Preparation	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power	Decision @ 0.05	Interpretation
Review	0.52	0.48	0.02	0.52	0.11	Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Coaching	0.03	0.86	0	0.03	0.05	Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Physical and Mental Condition	0	1	0	0	0.05	Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Overall Preparation	0.18	0.68	0.01	0.18	0.07	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Profile in Terms of Discipline							
Test of Difference							
Preparation	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power	Decision @ 0.05	Interpretation
Review	3.28	0.02	0.41	16.41	0.81	Significant	Reject Ho
Coaching	1.93	0.13	0.29	9.67	0.55	Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Physical and Mental Condition	3.82	0.01	0.44	19.11	0.87	Significant	Reject Ho
Overall Preparation	3.74	0.01	0.44	18.71	0.86	Significant	Reject Ho
Profile in Terms of EPT rating							
Test of Difference							
Preparation	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power	Decision @ 0.05	Interpretation
Review	2.41	0.08	0.28	9.64	0.60	Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Coaching	3.67	0.02	0.37	14.68	0.81	Significant	Reject Ho
Physical and Mental Condition	2.91	0.04	0.32	11.65	0.70	Significant	Reject Ho
Overall Preparation	4.14	0.01	0.40	16.56	0.86	Significant	Reject Ho
Profile in Terms of RQA Rank							
Test of Difference							
Preparation	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power	Decision @ 0.05	Interpretation
Face Validity	1.69	0.18	0.21	6.76	0.44	Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Necessity	2.52	0.07	0.29	10.09	0.63	Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Fairness	1.31	0.29	0.17	5.24	0.35	Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Overall Preparation	2.39	0.08	0.28	9.57	0.60	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho

Results highlight that there is no significant difference in the preparation for the English Proficiency Test in terms of course. However, when it comes to their discipline or major, there shown a significant difference in terms of preparation. The result reveals that the level of preparation shown by the aspiring public SHS teachers depends on their discipline or major.

This is comparable to the result of the study of Quadir (2011) in which the correlation result showed that English majors exhibited a significant negative correlation between test preparation and motivation and the level of anxiety compared to non-English majors. English majors' high intrinsic motivation helped them to lower the level of failing the test. In the result of this study, TLE and Mathematics majors performed greater preparation because of being less exposed to the language.

Parallel to this, it reveals that non-English majors have greater anxiety of getting low scores on the EPT since they performed greater test preparation. In terms of the EPT rating, teachers' preparation is shown to have a significant difference. This means that teachers who got higher or lower EPT scores, exerted different level of efforts for the test preparation. On one hand, teachers' RQA rank is seen as not significant in the EPT preparation.

This implies that they do not see the test as main determinant of their ranks and that they may consider their preparation for the test to have little to no influence on their rank disposition. The overall result suggests that the RQA rank of the aspiring SHS public teachers on the English Proficiency Test is not important or is not relevant to their preparation for the EPT. By understanding the idea that teachers, regardless of course and discipline, are expected to be competent in the English language.

The EPT assures that aspiring SHS public teachers meet only the basics of the test content with careful consideration of the diversity in terms of educational background. This is supported by Wigglesworth (2008) who emphasized that a language test varies in its design and purpose with respect to the test method. It is not linked to any particular course of instruction but measures the general level. Test designs must be based on the intention and to whom it is intended.

Further, Stephen, Jordan, and Welman (2004) stated that the communication skills possessed by test-takers are essential to hone them become better teachers. The idea that teachers are automatic receivers of positive impressions in using the command of English is important to be preserved and proven since they are perceived as good at it regardless of major. Good communication skills develop qualities making them become better teachers.

6. Test of Relationship between Level of Perception on and Preparation for the English Proficiency Test among aspiring SHS teachers

Table 6 displays an overall significant moderate relationship between the teachers' preparation on and preparation for the EPT. This implies that perception and preparation on the English Proficiency Test are interconnected and interdependent.

Thus, it stresses out that aspiring public SHS teachers' preparation for the English Proficiency Test depends to his or her views and perceptions of the test. The more exposed the test-taker to the language, the more he or she feels less anxious about the getting low scores compared to those who are not. Therefore, both non-English majors' and English majors' preparation on the EPT lies in his or her perception of it.

Correlated to this, it shows an interrelation to the findings of the study of Xie and Andrews (2012) conducted to 870 language test takers in China where it showed that the perception of test design and the test itself influenced the preparation of the test-takers. It further revealed that some aspiring public SHS teachers treat EPT as essential rather than just seeing it as compliance with the employment process.

Table 6
Test of Relationship between Level of Perception on and Preparation for the English Proficiency Test among aspiring SHS teachers

	R	Degree	R²	p-value	Decision @ 0.05 Level	Interpretation
<u>Face Validity</u>						
Review	0.38	Low	0.142	0.04	Significant	Reject Ho
Coaching	0.36	Low	0.127	0.05	Significant	Reject Ho
Physical and Mental Condition	0.32	Low	0.099	0.091	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Overall	0.42	Moderate	0.176	0.02	Significant	Reject Ho
<u>Necessity</u>						
Review	0.084	Slight	0.007	0.66	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Coaching	0.109	Slight	0.012	0.57	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Physical and Mental Condition	0.193	Slight	0.037	0.31	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
Overall	0.136	Slight	0.018	0.47	Not Significant	Failed to Reject Ho
<u>Fairness</u>						
Review	0.531	Moderate	0.282	0.00	Significant	Reject Ho
Coaching	0.540	Moderate	0.292	0.00	Significant	Reject Ho
Physical and Mental Condition	0.386	Low	0.149	0.04	Significant	Reject Ho
Overall	0.594	Moderate	0.353	0.00	Significant	Reject Ho
<u>Overall Perception</u>						
Review	0.414	Moderate	0.171	0.02	Significant	Reject Ho
Coaching	0.419	Moderate	0.176	0.02	Significant	Reject Ho
Physical and Mental Condition	0.378	Low	0.143	0.04	Significant	Reject Ho
Overall	0.480	Moderate	0.230	0.01	Significant	Reject Ho

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The aspiring public Senior High school teachers who qualified for the March 2017 RQA are mostly non-Education applicants. Most of them are also Science majors. Majority of the teachers got an EPT rating ranging from 6.83-8.00. Among the 30 teachers, 11, which represent the majority, placed the 1st to 16th rank in the RQA result.
2. The aspiring public SHS teachers are also positive that the EPT is highly valid especially in its test purpose. They find the EPT as essential part in the employment process considering the idea that they are perceived and expected to be competent in the language regardless of course and discipline. The conduct of the EPT is essential in assessing aspiring public SHS teachers' basic knowledge of the language to help them become better teachers. English language is not only limited in the area of English subject but also in other areas such as mathematics and sciences where English is being used as the medium of instruction. Therefore, the competence of possessing language skills must be addressed not only to the teachers who are teaching English subject but also the other subject areas.
3. The aspiring public SHS teachers displayed moderate preparation on the EPT. It is undeniable that English majors perceive themselves to have an edge or advantage over those who do not major the language which made them do less preparation on the EPT. Since non-English majors are conscious of their language knowledge capacity, they perform greater preparation for the test. However, non-English majors received a greater EPT rating than English majors. This only concludes that majoring the language can be a plus, but with greater preparation, it is possible to achieve higher EPT rating regardless if a teacher applicant majors in English or not.

Recommendations

Aligning to the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Department of Education may utilize this study as basis for improving hiring guidelines and qualifications of the aspiring public SHS teachers. In addition, this study may help them identify and develop further trainings needed by the teachers helpful for the improvement of their language skills.
2. The School Administrators may consider this study in understanding that a teacher's EPT result may be of a great impact on his or her language proficiency when teaching but will not tell everything about his or her teaching performance; and the consideration of the differences of the aspiring public SHS teachers in
3. terms of strengths and weaknesses especially during the deployment process.
4. The aspiring public SHS teachers may have a better understanding of the importance of EPT and how it can contribute to their teaching competence by instilling that regardless of major, it is important for them to be competent in the language. Not only that it is useful inside the classroom or in the teaching process, but also in socializing and dealing with school-related matters outside the school. Furthermore, this study may help them realize that in order to attain a good EPT rating, enough preparation must be done. When there is enough preparation for the test, there will be a better outcome and this affects their chance of getting a higher rank in RQA. Although EPT is only a small portion of the total RQA score, it is important for them to realize not to belittle the role of EPT in the employment process as it is still a part in order to complete the whole. Further and continuous study may be made on the English Proficiency Test and its connection as part of the employment process in order to address the numerous queries and arguments in the conduct of this test and its effects to test takers

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