

How to improve on the Malaysia University English Test (MUET)

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ABSTRACT--- *The study investigates on how to improve on the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) for admission and placement purposes which is widely practiced in pre-university students in Malaysia. The use of standardised English proficiency tests like IELTS and TOEFL is widely practised in academic institutions throughout the world. Similarly in Malaysia, many tertiary institutions utilise the results of a localised version of such test called the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) as a measure of students' proficiency level, as either an entrance requirement or an exit requirement in various academic programs.*

This exam is viewed as a big challenge by many students due to lack of language ability. This implies weaknesses such as limited vocabulary, grammar and language sub-skills, causing a major block to gain a good band score. Hence, this paper reports on the students as well as lecturers perception on MUET and also peeps into plausible suggestions on how MUET can be enhanced.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the vital role of the English language in tertiary institutions has long been recognized. Proficiency and competency in the language are regarded as a passport to better academic achievement (Bellingham, 1995). In Malaysia, English is widely used as a medium of instruction at the tertiary level (Gill, 2005). Thus, there is a great need to determine prospective students' English language proficiency before entering university. The widely used benchmark in determining one's proficiency in English for the purpose of admission into tertiary institutions is the Malaysian University English Test (MUET).

The main objective of MUET is to measure the English language proficiency of students. Depending on the university that the students wish to enroll in, MUET can serve as either an entrance requirement or an exit requirement. Basically, MUET is divided into the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. It measures and reports candidates' level of proficiency based upon an aggregated score ranging from 0 to 300. The scores correlate with a banding system ranging from Band 1 to Band 6; Band 1 being the lowest where else Band 6 being the highest. A results slip is issued to every candidate who completes all four components of the test.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

For this article, we had discussed the ways to improvise the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) to be more efficient. Research had been done a few years ago, as per MUET as a predictor of academic achievement in ESL teacher education, Othman, J. & Nordin, A.B. (2013). This article had observed and it was based on prediction to achieve the ESL studies for those taking MUET. The authors studied that it is easier when MUET can help the students to be more proficient in English. It also stated that Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) measured to relate with the language proficiency. They related these two scores and the students can be more efficient and also they can be fluently in English subject.

As for the MUET as a predictive validity study, Rethinasamy, S. & Chuah, K. M. (2011) had discovered this paper is a valid study to be more fluently. They studied for UNIMAS students based on Preparatory English Test 1 & 2 for those who achieved Band 1, 2 & 3 in MUET paper. The scores assessed for the Preparatory Test 2 which covers different specific skills. Last but not least, Generic English language courses for those obtained MUET band 4, 5 & 6. Students with Band 2 & 3 are required to obtain a pass in Preparatory Test 2 before they sign up to English language courses.

Based on these researches, they quite similar in prediction and also MUET as validity study for ESL students. They obtained same discussion and they had the similarities for MUET and IELTS for the language proficiency. The authors too indicate MUET as a reliable measure of students' language ability and accurately predictive of academic performances. This article will further studies on peoples' perception on the four skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to facilitate data collection, the study adopted the quantitative as well as **qualitative approaches**. **Quantitative** means were used to investigate the causal relationship between variables.

Qualitative measures in the form of a **focus group interview** were also undertaken to describe an existing phenomenon, i.e. the students as well as the lecturers perception on MUET and how it can be further improved. Seven students, three teachers as well as six lecturers were picked at random and answering questionnaires. Their answers are chosen and given as it will be used later in the discussion sub heading.

Data collection

The observation is manually conducted as we had provided questionnaire templates to the group and they need to answer and give us what is their point of view based on MUET skills. The factors such as the understanding of the exam, weakest paper, opinions and rating were included in the templates. The templates were given to the twelve random people and they are currently from different backgrounds and we just simply ask them to come out with their own opinions. This observation takes place in College Poly-Tech Mara Bangi, Sekolah Seri Suria and University Putra Malaysia (UPM) students.

Data Analysis

The templates were interpreted as in charts and tables in Results section. We discovered the sixteen peoples had come out with similar suggestions and they wanted to the paper will be better than previously.

Below, is the layout of the MUET format given by Malaysian Examination Council or Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia (MPM); it consists of mode of the duration and the total scores for the specific paper.

Layout of the MUET format

Paper Code	Paper	Duration	Weight age	Maximum Score
800/1	Listening	30 minutes	15%	45
800/2	Speaking	30 minutes	15%	45
800/3	Reading	90 minutes	40%	120
800/4	Writing	90 minutes	30%	90
TOTAL			100%	300

4. RESULTS

Below is the result of the questionnaire templates that we had observed and interpreted it as in Chart 1.

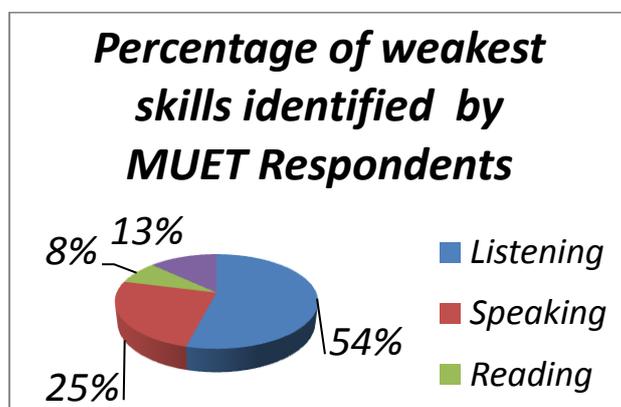


Chart 1: pie

The Pie Chart 1 above indicates the most flawed skill in the MUET. The researchers analysed the questionnaires and looked for a pattern in them. The pie chart above indicates the pattern that was found. 8% of the respondents said that the reading skill had the least flaws. On the contrary, majority agreed that the listening skill had the most flaws with a total number of 54%.

As for the suggestions 8 of the respondents gave suggestions pertaining to the rubric which included issues pertaining to the listening text itself, the loudness of the volume as well as the accent of the person speaking some even suggested to provide the test takers with earphones to enable them to listen to the text better hence successfully answering the exam.

From the pie chart, 25% of the respondents said that the speaking skill had the average flaws. As for the speaking skill most respondents suggested that to allocate more time to prepare themselves before the test starts, pleasing ways where students feel more confident and easy to speak and some suggested to provide microphones.

Lastly, 13 respondents gave suggestions to give students to choose and write whatever they want to and as long it is relevant to academic instead of interpreting data which exists in current MUET examination, duration of writing to be extended and few suggested to give easier topic in essay writing.

5. DISCUSSION

Hence the researchers claim that indeed listening is the skill that needs the most improvisation. This statement is further strengthened by the findings of the questionnaire whereby 54% of the respondents agreed with the claims that listening is the skill that needs the most improvisation.

One of the set back that the researchers faced or our limitation was the respondents themselves. Some of them were too busy to fill in the questionnaire that they decided to 'WhatsApp' the answers instead. The issue that can be raised here is the issue of copy and paste feature that can be used or might have been used by the respondents. Some, especially those who are not from language background were not very familiar with the skills and exam structures. Due to this they were asking for a brief explanation before answering the questionnaire.

University Putra Malaysia Undergraduates respondents were able to answer the questionnaire without any further clarifications because they are exposed to MUET formerly.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper uncovered that listening skill is indeed the skill that had the most flaws followed by the speaking, writing and last but not least reading. Listening skill in the MUET should be taken into consideration seriously as it is also a part of the requirement in passing the MUET test. Meanwhile the setbacks faced by the respondents or other test takers in the listening test should be improved so that the MUET test itself can be more valid and reliable which really tests the listening skill.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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APPENDIXES

1. TEST FORMAT

MUET comprises **four** papers. Candidates are required to sit for all the four papers.

Details of the four components are as follows.

Paper 1: Listening (30 minutes)

Candidates will be required to listen to recorded texts twice and answer questions on them.

There is a total of 20 questions consisting of information transfer, short-answer questions, 3-option multiple-choice questions and 4-option multiple-choice questions.

Paper 2: Speaking (30 minutes)

Candidates will be required to perform two tasks: individual presentation and group interaction.

For the individual presentation, candidates will be given 2 minutes to prepare for the given task and 2 minutes to present. Candidates will also listen to the other candidates while they are making their presentations and take down notes for the group interaction.

For the group interaction (4 to a group), candidates will be given 2 minutes to prepare points to support or oppose the other candidates' views. After listening to everyone in the group, candidates will try to come to a consensus. The group will be given 10 minutes for the group interaction.

Paper 3: Reading (90 minutes)

This paper comprises 45 multiple-choice questions based on passages from texts which may be taken from journals, newspapers, magazines, and academic and electronic sources. Questions are in the form of 3-option multiple-choice and 4-option multiple-choice questions.

Paper 4: Writing (90 minutes)

This paper comprises two writing tasks: transferring information from a non-linear source to a linear text and a piece of extended writing. The stimulus may take the form of linear and/or non-linear texts.

2. Description of MUET Scores

Description of Aggregated Scores AGGREGATED SCORE	BAND	USER	COMMUNICATIVE ABILITY	COMPREHENSION	TASK PERFORMANCE
260 – 300	6	Highly proficient user	Very fluent; highly appropriate use of language; hardly any grammatical error	Very good understanding of language and context	Very high ability to function in the language
220 – 259	5	Proficient user	Fluent; appropriate use of language; few grammatical errors	Good understanding of language and context	High ability to function in the language
180 – 219	4	Satisfactorily user	Generally fluent; generally appropriate use of language; some grammatical errors	Satisfactory understanding of language and context	Satisfactory ability to function in the language
140 – 179	3	Modest user	Fairly fluent; fairly appropriate use of language; many grammatical errors	Fair understanding of language and context	Fair ability to function in the language
100 – 139	2	Limited user	Not fluent; inappropriate use of language; very frequent grammatical errors	Limited understanding of language and context	Limited ability to function in the language
Below 100	1	Very limited user	Hardly able to use the language	Very limited understanding of language and context	Very limited ability to function in the language

3. Questionnaire template

MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY ENGLISH TEST (MUET)

Questionnaire

Occupation: _____

Sex: _____ Age: _____

Q1. What do you understand by the Malaysian University English Test (MUET)?

Q2. Do you think MUET is compulsory for all tertiary level students?

Q3. According to you, which is the skill that has more flaws in MUET?

Q4. From your point of view, suggest how these flaws in MUET can be overcome and improve?

Q5. How do you rate the MUET skills?

- Excellent
- Very effective
- Good
- Average

~THANK YOU ~