INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
IJOSSH, Vol 2(2) 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.25047/ijossh.v2i2.6686

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Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia

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Laying the Groundwork for a CEFR-Referenced English Proficiency Test with Vocational Nuance at Politeknik Negeri Jember

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Abstract

English language proficiency tests have become an integral part of English language learning. Several standardized English proficiency tests are offered to test takers for various purposes. TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC are those that are widely recognized internationally. Standardized English tests have also been developed by institutions in Indonesia, such as TAEP by the University of Muhammadiyah Malang and TOEP (PKBI) by the Indonesian Test Service Center (PLTI). However, to date, there are still no similar tests administered by institutions in Indonesia specifically designed for vocational contexts. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the needs of developing a blueprint for the English proficiency test of Jember State Polytechnic (Polije) with a vocational nuance referring to the Common European Framework of Reference. Data were obtained through interviews with the Head of the Language Center of Polije, analysis of existing documents of the test blueprint and samples, analysis of the development of departments at Polije for the consideration of the vocational aspects, and analysis of the CEFR which will serve as the reference of the blueprint. The results of the data analysis will serve as the basis for developing a blueprint for the Polije English proficiency test with a vocational nuance referring to the CEFR.

Keywords: *Standardized Test Blueprint, English Proficiency Test, EPT for Vocational Context, Common European Framework of Reference*

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1. Introduction

English proficiency test has been an integral part of English language teaching in any levels and contexts. The globally recognized standardized tests like TOEFL, IELTS (Olaleye, 2024), and TOEIC have transformed and developed in quest of providing valid and reliable evaluation. This is due to the fact that the certificates of English proficiency test are considered important in various occasions, including administrative issues (Ockey & Gokturk, 2019). Interestingly, a number of Indonesian institutions have initiated to administer their English language proficiency tests. Similar step was also initiated by Politeknik Negeri Jember (Polije), specifically the Language Center Polije by administering an English language test called English Proficiency Test (EPT) Polije. As a consequence, Language Center Polije needs to keep carrying out necessary improvements to beef up the test. One of the fundamental actions is regarding the necessary improvements of the current test.

One of the most important aspects of improvements, regarding the previous statement, is redesigning or redeveloping the blueprint of EPT Polije. The development of test blueprint has been discussed widely among scholars, not necessarily in ELT context, as one of the key points of successful testing. The blueprint consists of test specifications (Cheewasukthaworn, 2022; Davies, 2008; Raymond & Grande, 2019) that describe the properties of the test which as the guidelines of the test administrations along with what is claimed by the test (Raymond & Grande, 2019); that the scores of the test takers truly represent their proficiency. Therefore, blueprint development can be considered as one of the basic steps when it comes into administering valid and reliable test.

In relation with the development of the blueprint of EPT Polije, it is essential to carry out various steps. The initial preparation (Sofendi, 2016), should be undergone prior to designing the blueprint. This is in line with what explained by Raymond and Grande (Raymond & Grande, 2019) who explain that the first step in the whole process of developing test blueprint is identifying the major knowledge and skill domains. Kunwar (2018) supports the ideas by explaining that blueprint development is the first stage to complete in the whole process of test administration.

To go more detailed, (Kunwar, 2018) explained that there are six steps in developing a standardized test, including English proficiency test. The first step is developing the blueprint as the guidelines. Next, the initial draft of the test can be structured based on the blueprint. When the draft is ready, the process goes to pilot testing. When done, the results of the pilot testing can be analyzed to investigate whether each test item really tests what is intended to be tested. After the analysis, and revision when needed, the whole set of the test can be made. This is the time when the real testing can be administered.

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However, it is, still, essential to make sure that further evaluation should be conducted. Therefore, validity and reliability analysis should be done periodically.

Yusof (2023) proposes, somewhat, different concept. He also suggests six steps in developing good test. In this case, the first step is planning and designing the test followed by deciding the most appropriate scoring method. Next, the set of test items can be developed based on the previous stages. Similar to the previous concept, the test items should also be analyzed to make sure that the set is well-constructed. When needed, a revision can be done. Finally, the test administrator can finalize and release the real test. In addition, it is important to note that even Yusof (2023) does not explicitly the term 'blueprint', it is clear that this the blueprint is developed in the designing the test and deciding the scoring method as those two aspects should appear in a blueprint.

An interesting issue to discuss about blueprint is that developing a test blueprint may require several steps. As suggested by Raymond and Grande (2019), there are four stages in blueprint development. First, it is important to identify the major knowledge and skill domains. Next, the objectives of the test should also be delineated. By doing the two stages above, the test administrator can continue to determine the test formats. Lastly, specifying the weight to be given to each test item should be considered and determined carefully. By considering the four steps above, it is clear that developing a blueprint may not be as simple as expected. Therefore, even the very first step, identifying the major knowledge and skill domains, is interesting to be discussed as a distinctive issue.

As implied above, this study covers the discussion on the existing condition regarding EPT Polije, along with the development of Politeknik Negeri Jember as a vocational higher institution, and the target development of the future blueprint. This aims at discovering the gap between the current conditions with the future expectation which is considered the more ideal one. As the part of broader spectrum, this study was the initial stage of a research and development (RnD) of developing the blueprint of EPT Polije. To be more detailed, this study was intended to answer two questions: 1) how was the current condition of EPT Polije and 2) what improvement was needed to develop the new blueprint of EPT Polije.

2. Method

This research was the initial phase of a research and development (R&D) project aimed at developing an English language test blueprint for the Politeknik Negeri Jember (Polije). In this study, the researchers conducted a study to obtain the necessary data as the foundation for developing the Polije EPT blueprint. Specifically, this research focused on analyzing relevant documents, such as the existing blueprint of EPT Polije, test items of EPT Polije including the written and spoken ones, and student workbooks at the

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departments of Polije. Therefore, this paper employed a document analysis research design (Ary et al., 2010), supported by an interview with the Head of Language Center of Polije. Regarding the overall process, this study covered five 5 out of 6 stages as seen in Figure 1. In this case, the final stage, developing the new blueprint of EPT Polije was in progress at the time this study was reported.

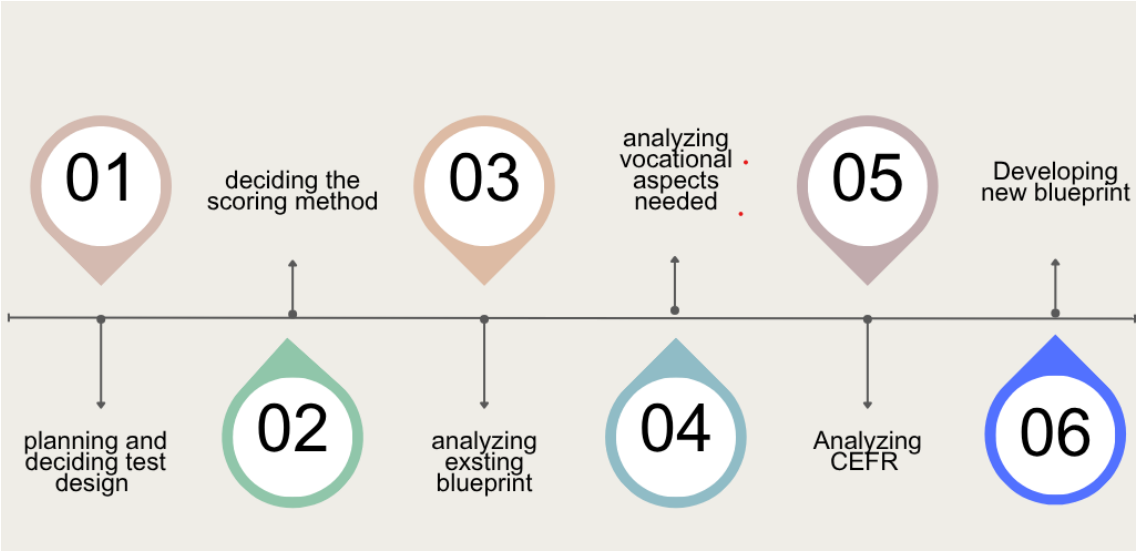


***Figure 1**. Stages of EPT Blueprint Development*

In collecting the data, there were several stages conducted. First, the researchers interviewed the Head of Language Center of Polije. The aim was to understand current conditions regarding the administration and future program regarding EPT Polije. In the next stages, the researchers continued to analyze the development of departments and study programs at Polije, including the analysis of Students' Workbook (BKPM) of Intermediate English, and the analysis of the test items of EPT Polije to explore how far vocational aspects were covered and the level of difficulties based on CEFR. The data was, then, analyzed and presented descriptive qualitatively in the findings and discussion.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1 Interview with the Head of Language Center Polije

As briefly explained previously, the first step conducted to collect the data was through interview with the Head of Language Center Polije. This interview aimed to gather data related to the general overview of the EPT Polije, the current state of its implementation, and aspects of future development. The interview used open-ended questions to gain in-

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depth information regarding the implementation of the EPT, particularly the development of the Polije EPT blueprint.

3.1.1 General overview of the EPT Polije

The first aspect explored through the interview with the Head of Language Center Polije was a general overview of the EPT Polije. She explained that the English proficiency test at Polije has been in existence for several years, when the UPA was still known as the Language Service and Training Unit (UP2B) and the Polije Language Technical Support Unit (UPT). The test's name has also changed over time.

Language Center Polije started creating new sets of test when the previously available had been implemented. Several improvements were made especially regarding the development of departments and study programs at Polije. In this case, additions were made to the vocabulary aspect and the types of texts tested by referring to the development of the study programs as previously mentioned. Meanwhile, the sentence structure or grammar and aspects tested in each question remained the same and referred to the existing grid from the previous period.

In addition, the Head of Language Center Polije also expected to include local contents in EPT Polije. She explained that this would be more suitable for students who learn in Indonesian context, specifically Jember, rather than contents related to things outside the country. As explained by Rosalina et al., (2020), students who study in the local college mostly engaged with and experience similar culture. This should be accommodated in the new blueprint of EPT Polije.

3.1.2 The Existing Blueprint of EPT Polije

The existing blueprint of EPT Polije has been used for several years. According to the Head of Language Center Polije, the blueprint, indeed, needed to be improved. The first was related to how suitable the existing blueprint was with the current conditions of Polije. She explained that the current nuance tended to be academic rather than vocational. Therefore, the new version of the blueprint was expected to provide the basis for the future sets of EPT Polije to more suitable with the characteristics of Polije as a vocational higher education.

Other issues explained by the Head of Language Center Polije were the scoring system and additional number of test items. The existing scoring system was quite difficult to understand. The score was ranging from 0 to 140, and test takers needed further explanation regarding the results. Therefore, the Head of Language Center Polije

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suggested the researchers to formulize new scoring system that can be recognized easily by the test takers. About the number of the test items, current blueprint consists of 140 test items that covers 60 numbers in listening section, 40 numbers in structure and vocabulary section, and 40 numbers in reading section. Based on the interview, it is expected that the new blueprint consist of 200 items that include grammar and vocabulary, listening, and reading. Therefore, there were 60 additional items needed in the new blueprint.

3.2 Analysis of the Current Development of Departments at Polije

In this stage, the researchers investigated two issues. There were the current development of departments and study programs at Polije and the English materials presented in students' workbook at each department. The data was collected by visiting the official website of Polije and analyzing the workbooks. By conducting this, the researchers were able to identify the vocational elements to be included in the new blueprint of EPT Polije. This provided the pictures on how vocational materials were presented in English language teaching at Polije especially for students with different focuses of disciplines. In this case, the researchers analyzed and categorized the data into six categories of disciplines. Based on the categorization, vocational aspects could be distributed and operationalized in the test items fairly and proportionally.

3.2.1 Current Departments and Study Programs at Polije

According to official information on the official website of Polije, Polije currently offers nine majors. These include 1) Agricultural Production, 2) Agricultural Technology, 3) Animal Husbandry, 4) Agribusiness Management, 5) Information Technology, 6) Language, Communication, and Tourism, 7) Health, 8) Engineering, and 9) Business. The official website also provides information about international classes and study programs outside the main Campus (PSDKU). Within these nine majors, there are 31 study programs offered.

These developments have expanded the vocational offerings at Polije. This needs to be accommodated in the new Polije EPT blueprint so that all academic disciplines are covered within the Polije EPT.

3.2.2 Analysis of Student's Workbooks (BKPM) of Intermediate English

The content analysis of the BKPM of Intermediate English course focused on written texts, both functional and non-functional, and listening. This was related to the objectives of the blueprint of EPT Polije development, which emphasized vocational nuances. This

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analysis demonstrated whether the materials presented to students in the course represent the vocational characteristics of each major. Additionally, one major, the Business Department, does not yet have an Intermediate English BKPM, so the analysis could not be conducted in this department.

It was found that the materials presented in the BKPM were not fully related to the discipline of each department. There were materials both in reading and listening sections that were not specific to the department. Those materials rather belong to general English. This finding opened the possibility for the new blueprint of EPT Polije to include certain number of general English test items.

The categorization of the scope of the fields covered in the new blueprint of EPT Polije was also specified in this stage. This can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. *Categorization of the Fields Covered in the Bluepring*

Categories	Related Departments
Agriculture	• Agricultural Production • Agricultural Technology • Agribusiness Management • Animal Husbandry
Information Technology	• Information Technology
Engineering	• Engineering
Health	• Health
Language, Communication, and Tourism	• Language, Communication, and Tourism
Business	• Business

An important consideration regarding the different fields of study available at Polije, it is crucial to make sure that the test items constructed should be fair and valid that each test taker is tested without bias (Parry, 2020), especially when the test items are pre-constructed and stored in the question bank.

3.3 Analysis of the Existing Blueprint of EPT Polije

The analysis of the existing blueprint of EPT Polije was very crucial. In fact, the main aim of the project was to develop new version of the blueprint. In this case, the analysis focused on format of the blueprint and gap regarding the addition numbers to be included.

Regarding the format, the existing blueprint of EPT Polije provided very detailed information about the test specifications. These included part or section of the test, competence being tested, indicator, source of material, the item number, the themes or

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topics, the test items, the options, and the answer keys. In addition, for the listening section, there was additional column consisted of the scripts of the listening materials.

Based on the data above, the new blueprint of EPT Polije needed to be constructed in less complex format. Some details could be eliminated to simplify the format. In this case, the new blueprint would not include the test items, options, and answer keys, as well as the scripts for the listening section. Besides the elimination, the level of CEFR would also be added for each number in the new blueprint. Further, the new blueprint would also include the additional 60 test items according to the result of the interview with the Head of Language Center Polije. By considering this, the blueprint, which is intended to help construct representative, reliable, and valid test (AlFallay, 2018), could be well-developed.

3.4 Analysis of the Existing EPT Polije Test Items

Out of the total number of EPT Polije items, there were 104 questions analyzed in regarding this stage. Regarding the analysis of the test items of the existing EPT Polije, the samples are not presented in this article due to the fact that those were being applied at the time being. Because of the ethical issue, no sample test items are provided anywhere within the article. The test items being analyzed can be seen in the following table.

***Table 2**. Samples of Test Items being Analyzed*

Section	Question Types	Number of items	Total number
Grammar and Vocabulary	Sentence completion	54	104
	Dialogue	11	
Reading	Short paragraph completion (fill in the blank)	15	
Listening	Short conversation and longer conversation/lecture/monolog/phone call	24	

Regarding the results of analysis based on the CEFR level of each test item, in general, most of the test items have been considered ideal especially with the reference of the existing blueprint. Out of 104 items, 12 were categorized into A1 and A2, 35 were categorized into B1 and B2, and 6 were categorized into C1 and C2. This is the gap that needs to be considered when developing the new blueprint. Based on the interview with the Head of Language Center Polije, the improvement regarding level of difficulties was necessary. Regarding this, numbers of test items to measure English proficiency at B2

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and C1 levels needed to be improved. As a consequence, the A1, A2, and B1 levels should be adjusted. It also shows that Language Center of Polije has the strong desire to keep improving.

Dealing with the vocational aspects presented in the text items, both written and spoken, it was found that they were not fully related to the characteristics of Polije as a vocational higher education institution. There were texts that belonged to general or academic English. Besides, the improvement regarding the use of functional texts such as email, advertisement, user manual, and so on should also be considered to be presented in proportional way in the blueprint. By considering this matter, the vocational nuance of the new blueprint of EPT Polije could be created.

To sum up, the whole process of this study provides the picture of what gap to answer dealing with the development of the new blueprint of EPT Polije. There are aspects to improve in order to create more comprehensive and applicative blueprint as the guideline of the construction of the test. The following table summarizes the aspects to improve.

Table 3. *Aspects to Improve for the New Blueprint of EPT Polije*

Aspects	**Description**
Format	The format needed to be simplified.
Number of Questions	Additional questions were needed to get the total of 200 items
Vocational Aspects	The test items should cover the fields being studied at Polije with the categories as seen in Tabel 1. These were distributed and operationalized proportionally in the test items.
Difficulties based on CEFR	Improvements were needed to level up the test items with the distribution of 25 – 50 – 25: • 25% of the items at A1 and A2 levels • 50% of the items at B1 and B2 levels • 25% of the items at C1 and C2 levels

4. Future Implementation plans

As explained earlier, this study only covered 5 out of 6 stages of the overall process of the development of the new blueprint for EPT Polije. It means that the future plans include the development of the blueprint by considering the data collected in this study. Further, the development of the prototype of the EPT based on the new blueprint will be conducted in the following years, including the pilot testing and psychometric analysis. This is in line with the research roadmap planned by the researchers.

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5. Conclusion

This study clearly demonstrates that developing an English proficiency test blueprint required careful and deep preparation. The long process undergone in this study had provided the researchers with important information dealing with the gap and potential improvement to be considered in developing the new blueprint of EPT Polije. By completing this, the purpose of the study as suggested in the title had been reached so that the groundwork for the blueprint of CEFR-referenced English proficiency test with vocational nuance at Politeknik Negeri Jember had been achieved.

The results of this study were, then, implemented in the development of the blueprint of EPT Polije. As clearly explained, there are aspects to be improved systematically and structurally in the new blueprint. Furthermore, this study also demonstrates that administering test, in any fields of study, may require careful and long process. Therefore, implementing such process is recommended for those who are interested in conducting similar project.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge the support received from Politeknik Negeri Jember whose funding under the PNBP 2025 program provided us with the resource to conduct and finish this study. The acknowledgement also goes to head of Language Center of Polije and Head of Departments of Polije for providing us with the access to collect the information and data regarding the study

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