

SCRUNTINIZING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS BASED ON CEFR

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Abstract

English has become one of the common tongues of the international community. Provided that fact, many English programs are offered to promote students' English skills to prepare students facing the globalization era and workforce. Besides, to answer the 21st-century skills the government has attempted to change curriculum. However, there are still many students who are low in their English proficiency. This research was conducted to scrutinize the students' English proficiency based on CEFR. It was done at SMPN 40 Surabaya as the population. There were 103 students from four classes of eighth grade participated in this research. The research was conducted in both quantitative and qualitative. The test using the KET (Key English Test) by Cambridge was administered to find the students' English proficiency. However, due to the limited time, it was limited to only Listening, Reading and writing sections. Then, the results were analyzed with CEFR (Common European Framework). The result was most of the participants were at A1 for reading as well as writing while they were at A2 for listening. It means that the students understand English quite well and they can communicate in English for daily use..

Keywords: English, Proficiency, CEFR, KET

INTRODUCTION

English has become a common language around the world since years ago, and it has

been a main school subject in Indonesia, especially at the secondary school level. Mastering English will help students compete in the workforce. Based on the Basic Competences in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 68, 69, and 70/2013, The goal of secondary English language instruction is to help students become more proficient communicators in the target language both orally and in writing, using all four language skills, in a range of settings and for a variety of purposes, utilizing a variety of text types and language functions.

Henceforth, many English programs are offered to promote students' English skills in order to prepare them for future challenges (Efendi, n.d.). However, in some cases, students find that English is difficult to learn due to its complexity, especially with productive skills ((Fransy & Ramli, 2022; Zannah et al., 2022). Due to those reasons, many students fail to attain language competence and performance. Fundamentally, the terms competence and performance were first introduced by Chomsky (2014). He mentioned that competence refers to a person's knowledge of language. If someone is competent, it means he knows the language. Later, he compares performance, which means the ability to produce the language. It is more about the language. The ability to perform the language. People who are competent are not guaranteed to be good performers of languages; vice versa, people who are able to perform a certain language do not mean they are competent. Then, from his point of view, a concept of linguistic competence and communicative competence was born.

Those two are related in terms of English proficiency level. Proficiency is supposed to be the goal of teaching English since it is an indicator of someone's ability to use the targeted language. According to Rubio & Hacking (2019), a person who is proficient in English has a good understanding of English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation and is able to use these language skills to communicate their thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively. Achieving English proficiency is often a key requirement for academic and professional success, particularly in contexts where English is the primary language of instruction or communication.

English proficiency can be measured through various standardized tests, such as the TOEFL or IELTS, or through informal assessments of a person's reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities in English. Another standardized measurement in testing English proficiency is through CEFR Framework. CEFR is the acronym for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It is a set of guidelines used to describe the language proficiency of foreign language learners in Europe and beyond (Sudaryanto & Widodo, 2020). The CEFR was developed by the Council of Europe and is used by language teachers, institutions, and organizations as a way of assessing and communicating a learner's language abilities. It was developed by the Council of Europe and first published in 2001. The CEFR aims to provide a common basis for describing language proficiency in a consistent and transparent way and to facilitate communication between language learners, teachers, and

institutions (Birch, 2021).

This reference is divided into three major categories: basic users, independent users, and proficient users. Each group is divided into six levels. The descriptor says that students in the first level, A1 level, are those who begin learning English and use very limited basic phrases in everyday communication. Next, the official level description in the CEFR says the next level is known as A2, or elementary. At this level, students have mastered basic English and can communicate simple basic needs. Students are able to use and know very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, and work. They employ basic grammatical structures and simple terms related to their routines. Furthermore, English level B1 is the third level of English in the framework. In everyday conversation, this level is called "intermediate." Students who are at this level have gone a head of basic English, but they have not yet been able to work or study completely in English. One step ahead of B1 is B2 level, where students are able to create and understand more complex and structured sentences. In everyday conversation, this level is commonly referred to as "upper intermediate." At this level, students can function independently in a variety of academic and professional environments using English, although with a limited range of nuances and accuracy. Meanwhile, C1 and C2 levels are at the stage where students are already proficient and mastery-level in using English, both academic and non-academic (Kamil, 2023).

The Key English Test, or KET, is one of the several international standardized test types that are based on the CEFR. There are four parts to the KET exam: speaking, listening, and reading and writing. Short writing assignments, gap-filling activities, and multiple-choice questions are all included in the Reading and Writing part. The candidate must respond to questions in the listening part based on what they hear in brief dialogues and monologues. In the speaking part, the examiner will invite the candidate to have conversation, the candidate has to perform in responding to questions about personal details, as well as they are asked to describe images or photos.

Testing or measuring students' English proficiency using international standard regularly seems pivotal to track their progress as Indonesian English proficiency is categorised low. According to EF EPI EF English Proficiency Index A Ranking of 113 Countries and Regions by English Skills (n.d.) in 2022, English in Indonesia ranked 79 out of 113 countries. It was below other Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. It implied that our teaching and learning needed to be evaluated. Speaking of proficiency, it usually falls into categories such as elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Those categories are assessed through five performance indicators, i.e., accuracy, fluency, complexity, appropriacy, and capacity (Richards & Pun, 2023) Based on much research, the major issues that hinder the students' productive skills are their low vocabulary and lack of grammar knowledge. If

someone is not able to produce a well-written sentence in terms of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, it means he does not have linguistic competence. As stated before, competence refers to the knowledge of language. Basically, there are three pivotal aspects of language learning: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. To put it another way, it is acquired through the ability to ask, “What words do I use?” and “How do I put them in sentences?”. Many studies have shown that students have difficulties expressing themselves, either orally or in writing, as they fail to answer those questions (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Koizumi & In’nami, 2013; Raju & Joshith, 2017). Many students do not know the words to express, and if they do, they get perplexed on how to arrange them in an accurate sentence to perform a meaningful sentence. Therefore, many of our students’ English proficiency is unsatisfactory. It implied that our teaching and learning need to be thought over and evaluated.

One of the attempts to promote the teaching and learning process is through curriculum change. Currently, the government has been implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The curriculum mandates teachers to teach students holistically, and it is supposed to ignite students’ ability to attain the 4Cs (creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication) skills. The changes in curriculum and teacher training will hopefully improve the English teaching and learning process.

Based on the explanations above, the researchers are interested in finding out junior high school students’ English proficiency. The latest curriculum goal is that by the end of senior high school, students are expected to be at the B1 level, or independent user threshold. Checking the junior high school students’ English proficiency could be a good start to gain data on where they are before going through senior high school. Later, the data can be used to decide what to do to improve the students’ proficiency in case the result is not satisfying.

There were some studies with the same scope. First, there was research conducted by Suryani & Amalia (2018). Their study was aimed at evaluating senior high school students’ English proficiency at Madrasah Aliyah Labor Kota Jambi. There were 104 participants in the study. The Key English Test (KET) was used as a means of language proficiency testing. The findings showed that most of them were not categorized by the entry level of CEFR as their scores were lower than those of the beginner level.

Next, there was a study was conducted by Damayanti et al. They tried to measure the English proficiency of students at Politeknik Balikpapan based on TOEIC. There were 291 students participating in this study. The reserach focused on comparing the students’ listening and reading comprehension mastery based om their TOEIC scores. The findings showed that a significant percenatge of students scored below 400, it indicated that their english proficieny did not meet the standards set by the institution and industry.

Those studies are in line with the study that was conducted by English First (EF). Based on the findings, it showed that Indonesian English Proficiency Index (EPI) in 2023 was on

the rank of 13 of 23 Asian countries and 79 of 113 countries. It was categorized low. The findings revealed that most of the students had not met the standard by both the institution and industry.

The present research shares similarities with that of previous researchers. One similarity is that they all focus on the proficiency level and the test's reading and writing. However, this research focuses on reading, writing, and listening tests, and the subject is junior high school. This research is an attempt to scrutinize the students' English proficiency based on CEFR using KET.

METHOD

The descriptive quantitative method was employed in this study to find out how proficient the participants' language was. Students from SMP Negeri 40 Surabaya served as the research subjects. Nine classes of grade 8 students from SMP Negeri 40 Surabaya made up the research population. Only four classes were selected as a sample from the population by the researchers, who did not employ the entire population in this study. Random sampling is the method of sampling that the researcher utilized. It is described as a sampling method in which researchers select participants at random from the general community. For the study, 103 eighth-graders were chosen by the researchers.

This research used descriptive quantitative method to seek the answer about the participants' language proficiency. Subjects of this research were students at SMP Negeri 40 Surabaya. The researchers did not use all the population in this research but he only took four classes as a sample from the population. The population of this research was grade 8 of SMP Negeri 40 Surabaya, there were 9 classes of them. Random the sampling technique used by the researcher is random sampling. It is defined as a sampling technique in which the researcher takes random subject from the population. At SMP Negeri 40, there are nine classes that belong to grade 8, the researchers selected 103 students of grade 8 as the participants of the study.

The instruments of collection the data are using Key English Test (KET). It was chosen because it is internationally recognized test which designed to measure the English proficiency in the basic level. The KET is at Cambridge Level One which is equivalent with A2. The test consists of four parts, listening, reading, writing and speaking. Of those four parts or skills, there were only three used in this study due to the time constraint. There are five parts in listening section which supposed to be done in 70 minutes, while there are nine parts in reading and writing sections which is supposed to be done in 30 minutes approximately. There are 80 questions: 8 parts for reading 35 questions, 20 parts for writing 20 questions, and 5 parts for listening to 25 questions. The Reading and Writing section assess the participants' ability to understand and use the English language in written form. This section includes

tasks such as reading comprehension and sentence completion. The Listening section, on the other hand, assesses the student's ability to understand the spoken English language. This section includes tasks such as multiple-choice questions, sentence completion, and short answers. The KET test is a reliable and valid tool to assess the student's English language proficiency level.

Before the test was given to the participants, it was tried out first to find out the validity and reliability of the test. It was found out that the reliability was 0.92 which was higher than the rule of thumb, meaning that the instrument was valid and reliable to be used. Regarding to the scoring system, listening and reading was given one for the correct answer, meanwhile, for the writing in form filling question ranges from 0 to 5. Then, the highest score would be 60. The test was first used to determine its validity and reliability before it was administered to the participants. The reliability was found to be 0.92, above the thumb rule, indicating that the instrument was legitimate and dependable for use. In terms of the scoring system, one point was awarded for hearing and reading correctly, while 0 to 5 points were awarded for writing in form completing questions. The greatest possible score would then be 60.

Tests taken by the students provided the desired data. Subsequently, a quantitative analysis of the data was conducted by figuring out the percentages of each question the respondents answered. One point was awarded to the the students for each right response. The researchers employed the subsequent formula:

$$\text{Formula: } (\text{points /no. items}) \times 100$$

Figure 1. formula for checking students' answer

The following table displays the conversion of the Cambridge English Language Assessment (CEFR)-based KET assessment.

Table 1 Cambridge English Score & CEFR Level

Cambridge English Scale Score	CEFR Level
140-150	Level B1
133-139	Level A2
120-132	Level A2
100-119	Level A1

Based on the table above, if they want to know if they have a low or high score, here's the range of differences they can get depending on the score they get. For example, if they

correct 34 questions out of 35 questions in Reading, how to calculate it is $34:35 \times 100$. Then it will give a total of 97%. The total will be entered into the <https://cambridgescore.com/ket>. The value will appear as 149, and it is entered at CEFR level B1, another example if they correct 12 questions out of 20 questions in Writing, how to calculate it $12:20 \times 100$ will give a total of 60. The total will be entered into the Cambridge calculator later. The value will appear as 112, and it is entered at CEFR level A1.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This research was aimed at finding out the students' English proficiency at SMPN 40 Surabaya. As the research intended, the researchers used Key English Test (KET) from Cambridge as a means of measuring the student's English proficiency, mainly in three skills (listening, reading and writing). The result of each skill is presented one by one as follows;

Based on the results of statistics, it was found the total average of reading proficiency level score at SMP Negeri 40 was 112. According to CEFR proficiency level description the mean shows that the Reading proficiency level of the students was in Level A1. It can be seen as follows;

Table 2. Students' Reading Proficiency

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score Reading	103	8	34	21	5.635
Valid N (listwise)	103				

Next, it was found the total average of writing proficiency level score at SMP Negeri 40 was 112. Based on the description of the CEFR competency levels, the mean indicates that the students' writing proficiency was at Level A1. It can be seen as follows;

Table 3. Students' Writing Proficiency

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score writing	103	0	20	12	4.878
Valid N (listwise)	103				

Then, it was found the total average of listening proficiency level score at SMP Negeri 40 is a score of 129 The mean indicates that the listening proficiency level of the eighth-grade pupils is at Level A2, in accordance with the CEFR proficiency level description.. It can be seen as follows;

Table 4. Students' Listening Proficiency

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score Listening	103	10	25	20	3.811
Valid N (listwise)	103				

Discussion

A student who has been sufficient and proficient in English can have a better access to the world's information that are mostly written in English. Therefore, students nowadays should be proficient in English. To add the government has already linked the English learning objective with CEFR, it means students are expected internationally recognized to achieve certain level of English proficiency.

Based on the findings, it was found that the average of participants' reading and writing proficiency was at the same level and their listening proficiency was a little bit higher in A2 level. It was categorized as good outcome since the participants were now still in the junior high level, it means they are already on the track as the objective of teaching and learning English at junior high school level is to help them sharpening their English as life skills.

The result indicated that the teaching and learning process was satisfying as English proficiency becomes one of the successfulness indicators in learning a language. Being proficient means, they can use the target language both oral and written targeted language. English proficiency refers to the ability of a person to use the English language effectively and accurately in various communicative situations (Azkiyah et al., n.d.). Additionally, person who is proficient in English has a good understanding of English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and is able to use these language skills to communicate their thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Achieving English proficiency is often a key requirement for academic and professional success, particularly in contexts where English is the primary language of instruction or communication (Sri Andayani, 2022).

Based on the overall results (listening, reading & writing) above, it can be seen that the students of SMPN 40 Surabaya were at A2 level in average. It indicates that their English know and understand English in simple situations such as shopping, dining out, and traveling.

If we refer to the national English language teaching goal in Merdeka curriculum as shown in the table that by the end of senior high school, students have to able to be proficient in using English at B1 level. it means that the participants of this study who are still at grade eight, and they have reached A2 level meaning that it is a promising result.

Table 5. English Learning Objective in Merdeka Curriculum

Phase A Grade 1-2	aimed at teaching spoken English and exposing the language.
Phase B Grade 3-4	emphasized proficiency in spoken English. Students are introduced to the written form on the other hand.
Phase C Grade 5-6	emphasized both verbal and written skills in languages. The Elementary level is coming to an end.
Phase D Grade 7-9	emphasis on enhancing written and spoken language proficiency.
Phase E & F Grade 10-12	The focus was on boosting written and spoken language proficiency, with the B1 Level of the CEFR as the goal.

CONCLUSION

Knowing students' progress through their English proficiency through standardized test is important, since it is one of the indicators whether the teaching and learning process is successful or not. This study revealed that the participants under the study are at A2 level based in CEFR. However, among those three skills, the participants need to work on their reading English proficiency which still at A1 level. But overall, compare to the previous studies mentioned above in the introduction, again, having this result was such a relief that our teaching and learning progress is getting better. The results indicate that the participants who were still grade eight understand and know how to use English as life skills and use it as daily communication tool. Further in the future, it could be conducted a study on students' speaking proficiency.

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