

# **Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Assessment of the Students' English Achievement**

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*Abstract. The need for the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia has been felt by almost all levels of society, especially in big cities. Without realizing the schools readiness, society has put a great expectation on the success of the English teaching. In fact, the success of the English teaching is also influenced by the parents' involvement in the school program. Parents' involvement will be beneficial when parents and teachers have the same perception about instructional programs, including the assessment of the students' achievement. The study proves that parents and teachers have similar perceptions of some aspects of the English achievement assessment but different perceptions of other aspects of the assessment. In some respects, such as the function of test, the types of tests used to assess students' English achievement, parents and English teachers are of the same perception. In other respects, however, such as the level of difficulty, the validity of the test, and the materials covered in the test, they are of different perception. This mismatch of perception may cause problems for the teachers, parents, and students.*

*Key words: perceptions, assessment, English achievement, secondary schools.*

## **Introduction**

The need for the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia has been felt by almost all levels of society, especially in big cities. People believe that the English mastery can guarantee the bright future of the students when they apply for a job. This great expectation is also responded by the policy makers by introducing English to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade of elementary schools based on the recent national curriculum. Even in practice, there are many kindergartens which also use English instruction.

The great expectation of society represented by parents and readiness of the schools, specifically represented by the English teachers are some of the many factors which contribute to the success of the teaching of English. Students' parents of the elementary and secondary schools still have a significant role in supervising their children's study. In practice, they do not only motivate their children verbally but also give concrete support such as giving additional exercise books, inviting tutors to give a private lesson and even tutoring their children themselves. This great involvement makes them more aware of all the aspects of their

children's study, including assessment. However it cannot be denied that most of the parents are laymen of the instructional program so that they might have different expectation from what their children's teachers provide and conduct in class. The gap between what the parents expect and what the teachers provide may stem from their different perceptions of assessment.

In an effort to empower parents' involvement in education, this study is carried out to reveal both parents' and teachers' perception of the assessment. The study specifically aims at answering the following questions

- a. What is parents' perception of the assessment of English achievement?
- b. What is teacher's perception of the assessment of English achievement?

## **Research Methodology**

### **The Instruments**

To obtain the data needed in this study, questionnaires were given to the responded randomly selected. To obtain the maximal results of the respondents' perception of the assessment of the students' English achievement two versions of questionnaire were administered. The first version was in Indonesian and the other was in English. The Indonesian version of the questionnaire was administered to the parent respondents. The English version was administered to the teacher respondents. To get further information, informal interviews with some English teachers were also conducted.

### **The Respondents**

The respondents of the study were 400 parents and 11 English teachers in three private senior secondary schools in Surabaya each of which having students from the low, middle, and upper class homes. Those teachers are English Department graduates who have been teaching English in Indonesian Senior Secondary School for 5 to 17 years. However, only 212 parent respondents returned the questionnaires. Thus there were only 212 questionnaires for parents and 11 questionnaires for teachers analyzed. The educational background of the parent respondents also varies from the elementary school to the graduate school. Stratified random sampling based on the educational background of the respondents was then used to determine the parent respondents. The educational background of the parent respondents returning the questionnaire is described in a more detail division as follows:

**Table 1**  
**Parent Respondents' Educational Background**

<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Number</b>
Elementary School & Junior Secondary School	ES/JSS	42
Senior High School	SSS	115
College/University ( Undergraduate /Graduate Schools)	C/U	56
Total Number		212 Respondents

Note:

- ES : Elementary School
- JSS : Junior Secondary School
- SSS : Senior Secondary School
- C : College
- U : University

**The Findings**

In general, parents and teachers have similar perceptions of the functions of tests and the types of tests used to assess students' English achievement, but different perceptions of the level of difficulty, the validity, and the materials covered in the tests. The data also reveal that the educational background of the parents does not significantly influence their perceptions of the assessment. Detailed descriptions of the findings are as follows:

**(a) Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Function of Achievement Assessment**

Achievement tests are, according to Finochiaro (1993), fundamentally used

- (1) to determine (a) whether our teaching methods and techniques are in fact producing learning and (b) which aspects of these are in need of revision
- (2) to measure students' achievement against previously established objective so that they can (a) be moved to the next higher level, if feasible, to other more suitable groups within the same level, (b) be certified as ready to be graduated from a school or to qualify for professional study or employment, (c) be held at the same level for another period of time, or (d) be excluded from the program.

The study reveals that most of the parent and the teacher respondents in the Senior Secondary School were of the same opinion. According to them the functions of achievement test administered in Senior Secondary School under study were as follows:

- a. to make report to the parents
- b. to identify the strengths as well as the weaknesses of instructional program

- c. to plan and to improve teaching program
- d. to motivate the students
- e. to monitor students' progress
- f. to determine grades
- g. to measure the students' achievement of the instructional objectives
- h. to determine students' class rank

Table 2 shows that most of the parent respondents thought that the main functions of achievement tests were to measure the students' achievement of the instructional objectives and to motivate students to study. As a whole there is no correlation between parents' educational background and their perceptions of the function of achievement test. The table indicates that 50% of the ES/JSS, 16% of the SSS, and 77% of the C/U parent respondents stated that the function of classroom test was to motivate students. The table also shows that 64% of the ES/JSS, 78% of the SSS and 96% of the C/U parent respondents stated that the function of classroom test is to measure students' achievement of the instructional objective. Only a few of them ( 4% of the ES/JSS, 2% of the SSS and 7% of the C/U parent respondents) stated that classroom test was to determine students' class rank.

**Table 2**  
**Parents' Perceptions of the Functions of Tests**

No	Test Functions	Number of responses					
		ES/JSS	%	SSS	%	C/U	%
1	To report to the parents	6	14	6	5	8	14
2	To identify the strengths and the weaknesses of the instructional program	1	2	4	3	6	11
3	To plan and to improve teaching program	1	2	4	3	7	13
4	To motivate students	21	50	18	16	48	77
5	To monitor students' progress	4	4	24	21	5	9
6	To determine grades	3	7	6	5	6	11

7	To measure the students' achievement of the instructional objectives	27	64	90	78	54	96
8	To determine students' class rank	2	4	2	2	4	7

Table 3 reveals that 100% of teacher respondents believed that the main function of classroom test is to motivate students. 73% of them mentioned that classroom test was used to monitor students' progress. Only 27% of them stated that classroom test was used to plan and to improve teaching program. 45 % of them stated that classroom test was to determine students' class rank.

**Table 3**  
**Teachers' Perception of the Functions of Tests**

No	Test Functions	Number	%
1	To report to the parents	5	45
2	To identify the strengths and the weaknesses of the instructional program	6	55
3	To plan and to improve teaching program	3	27
4	To motivate students	11	100
5	To monitor students' progress	8	73
6	To determine grades	5	45
7	To measure students' achievement of the instructional objectives	4	36
8	To determine students class rank	5	45

**(b) Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Kinds of Tests Used to Assess Students' English Achievement**

In terms of the kinds of test used to assess students' achievement, both parents and teachers were of the same opinion. The students' achievement was measured by using three types of tests, i.e.: daily quizzes (daily tests), formative tests (on-going test), and summative tests (end-of-term tests). The common terms known by parents as used by the teachers were: daily quizzes, formative tests (on-going test), and summative tests. Among these tests, daily quizzes were the most frequently administered in the classes. They also realized that the tests were done in written form. Most of the parents however expected oral tests, such as interviews were used to assess students' English achievement. Table 4 illustrates parents' perception of the kinds of tests used to assess students' English achievement. The table shows that 21% of the ES/JSS, 27% of the SSS and 28% of the C/U parent respondents stated that

the students' achievement was measured by means of an on-going test. 90% of the ES/JSS, 91% of the SSS, and 78% of the C/U stated that students' achievement was assessed by means of daily quizzes. 7% of the ES/SSS, 29% of the SSS and 55% of the C/U parent respondents stated that end-of term test was used to measure students' English achievement.

**Table 4**  
**Parents' Perception of the Kinds of Test Used**

No	Kinds of Test Administered	Number of Responses					
		ES/JSS	%	SSS	%	C/U	%
1	Test (on-going test)	9	21	28	27	19	28
2	Daily quiz	38	90	93	91	54	78
3	End-of-term test	3	7	30	29	31	55

Table 5 indicates that 89% of teacher respondents stated that students' achievement was mainly determined by means of daily quizzes. 67% of them stated that they measured students' achievement by means of on-going test. Only 22% of them stated that end-of-term test was used to measure students' achievement.

**Table 5**  
**Teachers' Perception of the Kinds of Test Used**

No	Kinds of Test Administered	Number	%
1	Test (on-going test)	6	67
2	Daily quiz	9	89
3	End-of-term test	4	22

Informal interview, however, found that most teachers realized that the average results of those three tests were used to make decisions about the students' English achievement, and at the end of the school year whether or not a student could be promoted to the higher level of education.

**(c) Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Test Contents**

Table 6 shows that 62% of the ES/JSS, 64% of the SSS, and 79% of the C/U parent respondents commented that the tests measured too much on grammar. The table also shows that 31 of the ES/JSS, 25% of the SSS, 39% of the C/U parent respondents commented that the test covered too much on vocabulary. Only 33% of the ES/JSS, 36 of the SSS, and 48% of the C/U parent respondents commented that the achievement test covered language skills.

In response to the perception above most parents expected the tests to cover language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Furthermore, some of them suggested speaking to be stressed so that their children would be able to communicate in English. The rest of the parent respondents mentioned that the test should cover grammatical rules and

vocabulary. Perhaps they believe that learning a language means learning grammatical rules and vocabulary; and without those language components one cannot communicate with the language learned.

**Table 6**  
**Parents' Perception of the Content of the Test**

No	The Components Measured	Number					
		ES/JSS	%	SSS	%	C/U	%
1	Grammar	26	62	74	64	44	79
2	Vocabulary	13	31	36	25	22	39
3	Language skills	14	33	41	36	27	48

Table 7 shows teachers' perception of the content of the achievement test they administered. 82% of them stated that the test they administered covered grammatical items, 73% of them stated that the test covered vocabulary and 45% of them stated that the test covered language skills.

Informal interview with some teachers, however, revealed that some teachers admitted that English skills and language components were analyzed integrately. But some others stated that the tests focused on the grammar only rather than on other components. Some other teacher respondents said that the tests measured the students' knowledge (competence) rather than performance. Thus the emphasis of the assessment was put on grammar rather than on the language skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing. If it was the case, the assessment applied did not accord with the principles of assessment as prescribed in the Teaching Program Guidelines that emphasized on language use rather than usage. As a result assessing students' achievement on grammatical items was the priority, vocabulary the second, and language skills was the least. The following table depicted the teachers' perception of the content of the English achievement test.

**Table 7**  
**Teachers' Perception of the Content of the test**

No	The Components Measured	Number	%
1	Grammar	9	82
2	Vocabulary	8	73
3	Language skills	5	45

**(d) Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Test Construction**

The tests used to measure students' achievement were teacher-made tests. Table 8 shows that 9 or 82% of teacher respondents mentioned that they themselves constructed the test by adapting exercises available in the supplementary materials, Only 2 (18%) of them admitted that they adopted test items available from supplementary materials and adapted test items from

supplementary materials (English exercise books available). Four teachers (36% of the teacher respondents) admitted that they constructed test items based on a table of specifications.

**Table 8**  
**The Construction of the Test Items**

No	Comments	Number	%
1	Test items were constructed by adapting test items from supplementary materials (English exercise books)	9	82
2	Test items were constructed by adapting test items from supplementary materials (English exercise books)	2	18
3	Test items were constructed based on a table of specifications	4	36

Table 9 indicates that eight or 73% of teacher respondents believed that the tests they constructed were valid because the tests covered the materials they taught to the students and the tests were relevant to the instructional objectives. They stated if the students were unable to do the test because they were not prepared for the test. However, 6 or 55% of the teacher respondents admitted that the tests they constructed covered broader than what had been taught to the students, and thus they lacked content validity.

**Table 9**  
**Teachers' Perceptions of the Content Coverage of the Tests**

No	Comments	Number	%
1	The materials are beyond the instructional materials	6	55
2	The materials represent teaching materials but the students are not well prepared	8	73

Among the 212 parent respondents, as illustrated in table 8, 38% of the ES/JSS, 27% of the SSS and 34% of the C/U parent respondents commented that the test materials were beyond the instructional materials. The table also indicates that 50% of the ES/JSS, 51% of the SSS, and 59% of the C/U parent respondents thought that the tests represented the teaching materials. The data show that 19% of the ES/JSS, 17% of the SSS, and 59% of the C/U parent respondents (35 respondents) did not give any comments about the test content. There were various causes for not answering the questions, among others was that they might have inadequate knowledge about the test content coverage.



**Table 10**  
**Parents' Perceptions of the Content Coverage of the Tests**

No	Comments	Respondents					
		ES/JSS	%	SSS	%	C/U	%
1	The materials are beyond the instructional materials	16	38	31	27	19	34
2	The materials represent teaching materials but the students are not well prepared	21	50	59	51	33	59

Furthermore, the statement that the tests were valid was however questionable because most teachers said that. (a) the tests were constructed just a few days before they were administered; (2) no try-out was done, and (3) the construction of the test was not based on the instructional objectives. Some others said that they constructed the test after they had completed teaching a unit of materials. In addition, there was no school guideline to construct the achievement tests. It seems that the tests were constructed intuitively without considering the content coverage, validity, and reliability as well as the instructional objectives.

Table 11 reveals that 18% of teacher respondents stated that the test was constructed while preparing for the instruction, 55% of them stated that they constructed the test just a few days before the test was given to the students, 9% of them stated the test was constructed when preparing unit lesson plans, 9% of them stated the test was constructed after identifying the topics, and 55% of them stated that the test was constructed after they finished teaching a unit of materials.

**Table 11**  
**The Test Construction**

The tests were constructed:

No	Answers	Number	%
1	While preparing the instruction	2	18
2	A few days before a test was given to students	6	55
3	When preparing unit lesson plans	1	9
4	After identifying topics	1	9
5	After finishing teaching a unit of materials and determining materials to cover in the test	6	55

**(e) Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of the Difficulty Level of the Test**

As indicated in table 12, 67% of the ES/JSS, 78% of the SSS, and 82 of the C/U believed that most of the tests belonged to the moderate level of difficulty. If their children got poor grades in English, it is not because of test but the children themselves who did not prepare themselves for the test although the teachers had informed the test schedule to them.

The table also indicates that 12% of the ES/JSS, 23% of the SS, and 14% of the C/U parent respondents, however, stated that the tests were difficult. 12% of the ES/JSS, 1% of the SSS, and 2% of the C/U parent respondents stated the test was too difficult for the children. They found their children had prepared well for the test and had mastered the materials taught; yet, they got poor grades. The reasons were, according to the: (a) the tests were too difficult, and (2) the contents of the tests were beyond the materials taught. Only 14% of ES/JSS, 2% of SSS, and 27 % of C/U parent respondents stated the test was essay.

**Table 12**  
**Parents' Perceptions of the Level of Difficulty of the Test Items**

No	Comments	Respondents					
		ES/JSS	%	SSS	%	C/U	%
1	Too difficult	1	2	1	1	1	2
2	Difficult	5	12	27	23	8	14
3	Moderate	28	67	90	78	46	82
4	Easy	6	14	2	2	15	27

In terms of the difficulty level, most of the teacher respondents believed that the vocabulary and grammar in the tests were not difficult. Table 13 indicates that none (0%) of the teacher respondents stated that the test was too difficult; 73% of them stated that the test was difficult, 73% of them stated that the test was moderately difficult, and 27% of hem stated that the test was easy. In addition, informal interview with teacher respondents revealed that none of the teacher respondents did any try-out and item analysis. Thus any evidence did not support their claim that the level of difficulty of the test belonged to the moderate level.

**Table 13**  
**Teachers' Perception of the difficulty level of the test items**

No	Difficulty Level	Number	%
1	Too difficult	0	0
2	Difficult	8	73
3	Moderate	8	89
4	Easy	3	73

**(f) Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Grade as a Success Indicator**

Table 15 shows that 78% of the teachers thought that parents considered that achieving high scores was more important for the parents than achieving high degree of learning. They also believed that parents thought that high grades in English reflected high degree of proficiency. Parents' opinion that a difficult test indicates the high quality of the English lesson was supported only by 44% of teacher respondents. It is true that grade is viewed as success indicator, but it is not the main focus of their consideration. This perception is however incorrect. The study revealed contradictory impression. Most parents considered both mastering teaching materials and achieving high scores were important. Table 14 shows that 86% of ES/JSS, 50% of SSS, and 100% of C/U of parent respondents considered both mastering teaching materials and achieving high score were equally important. The table shows that 81 % Of ES/JSS, 44% of SSS, and 100% Of C/U the parent respondents considered mastering teaching materials important. Only 14% of ES/JSS and 13% of C/U parent respondents considered high class rank important.

**Table 14**  
**Parents' Perceptions of the Success-Indicators**

No	Perception	Number					
		ES/JSS	%	SSS	%	C/U	%
1	Mastery of teaching materials	34	81	51	44	56	100
2	High score	6	14	37	32	11	20
3	Mastery of teaching materials and high score	36	86	58	50	56	100
4	High class rank	6	14	15	13	7	13

**Table 15**  
**Teachers' Perceptions of the Success-Indicators**

No	Perception	Number	Percentage
1	Parents think that the children should get high grades in all the tests	7	78
2	Parents think that high grades in English reflect high English proficiency	7	78
3	Parents think that a difficult English test proves that the English lesson is of a high quality	4	44

Informal interview also revealed that parents had the impression that parents did care much about their children's English ability and high scores did satisfy them. It can be concluded then that both teachers and

parents believed that the success or the failure in learning English was indicated by the grades the children gained. For them, poor grades means failure and good grades indicated success. Great efforts were therefore done by both parents and teachers to foster students' capacity in gaining good grades in English. Some of the parents always monitored their children's assignment. Some others sent children to non-formal English courses or private courses (courses given by individual person either at the children's home or the home of the teacher).

## **Discussion**

A good test must be valid, reliable and accountable. A good test must also be able to test the good, the average and the poor students. A test is valid if it measures what should be measured. In general the validity as well as the reliability of the test used to measure students achievement was however questionable because most teacher respondents said that. (a) the tests were constructed just a few days before they were administered; (2) no try-out was done, and (3) the construction of the test was not based on the instructional objectives. Some others said that they constructed the test after they had completed teaching a unit of materials. In addition, there was no school guideline to construct the achievement tests. It seems that the tests were constructed intuitively without considering the content coverage, validity, and reliability as well as the instructional objectives. If it is the case the results of the students' achievement reported to the parents, which are also used to determine whether or not the students can be promoted to the higher level of education, are invalid and unreliable. Unfortunately, because of their ignorance of the evaluation concept, all parents accepted whatever the results reported to them. When they found that the results of the English achievement of their children were not satisfactory they just said that the children were not well prepared for the test.

Most of the teacher respondents claimed that the tests they constructed belonged to the moderate level of difficulty; On the contrary, most parent respondents thought that the tests were difficult. The teachers' perception of the difficulty level, however, was not the result of item analysis. Thus, the discriminating power of the test was questionable. The test could not differentiate the good students from the average and from the poor ones.

Responding to the parents' complaint above, teachers claimed that the tests they constructed were not too difficult for the students. To improve the English achievement, teachers suggested parents: (a) ask their children to study harder; and (b) realize that learning a language is a process (it takes time), so that they should not justify their children's achievement in such a short term, besides language is dynamic. Parents are also expected to realize that language is something abstract. Parents are also expected to be wise not to simply justify their children's achievement from their scores. Parents should be well informed about

their children's progress by asking their children, checking the assignments or notebooks, or communicating with the English teacher.

The study reveals that both parents and teachers believed that the results of the achievement test reflect the students' English proficiency. However, informal talk with some teachers uncovered that many students could pass several semesters of language courses with high grades and still be unable to use the language for reading or for conversing with other people speaking English. Thus, the accountability of the result of the test was however questionable. Perhaps it is the result of the test focusing too much on language components, such as grammatical items and vocabulary. It may also be the result of instruction emphasizing too much on teaching language components rather than language skills.

Though the Teaching Program Guidelines of the 1994 Curriculum suggests a meaning-based approach be applied both in the teaching-learning process as well as in evaluating students' achievement. Most of the time available is spent on giving students discrete grammar exercises in loose sentences, not contextual. Thus, grammar is presented not as an element of communication. Grammar is presented in detail without considering grammatical items mostly needed in daily communication. The tests are also constructed accordingly.

The Teaching Program Guidelines of the 1994 Curriculum suggest a continuous evaluation be conducted along with the process of the teaching and learning activities. The study reveals that parents and teachers believed daily quizzes, on-going tests, and end of semester unit tests were administered to assess students' progress as well as the students' achievement. In addition, the decision made about the students' achievement and whether or not the students were promoted was based on the results of the on-going tests, daily quizzes, and end-of semester unit tests. Unfortunately, decision about students' achievement was only on the quantitative data found through classroom tests. Qualitative information obtained through observation of students' performance and personal interviews was never used to make students' achievement.

## **Conclusion**

The study uncovers the facts that parents and teachers have similar perceptions of some aspects of the English achievement assessment but different perceptions about other aspects of the assessment. In some respects, such as the function of test, the types of tests used to assess students' English achievement; parent and English teacher respondents are of the same perception. In other respects, however, such as the level of difficulty, the validity of the test, and the materials covered in the test, they are of different perception. This mismatch of perception may stem from:

- (a) the difficulties encountered by the teachers in implementing the principles of assessing the students' English achievement as well

as teaching English as outlined in the Teaching Program Guidelines of the 1994 Curriculum;

- (b) the parents being ignorant about the essence of achievement test in particular and test in general.

If it is claimed that the test content is relevant to the materials taught, this still does not meet the expectation of the parents, and the society in general, that the ultimate goal of teaching English is communicative ability or language use rather than usage. Thus, the parents also realize that mastering language components such as grammar and vocabulary cannot guarantee that a language learner can use the language for communication.

As revealed in this in this study, the wrong practice of constructing and administering English achievement tests and interpreting the test result has happened at school. In order for the English program in the secondary schools to yield a success, the school should made an appropriate attempt to overcome the wrong practice. The fact that quite a lot of trainings for trainers have been conducted is a good sign of the effort to improve the English program at schools. It should be realized, however, that many other factors do hinder the teachers' effort in implementing the right procedure of teaching and assessing students' English achievement.

### **Recommendation**

In order for the objectives of teaching English at the senior secondary schools to be optimally achieved, both parents and teachers should have the right perceptions of the interrelated elements of teaching including the assessment of the students' achievement, and thus, they can act accordingly. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers would like to recommend the following:

- (1) an in-depth analysis on the difficulties faced by the teachers in implementing the principles of assessment as well as teaching should be done, especially by the school managers, to give the right solution to the teachers.
- (2) the English teachers should be aware of their autonomy and responsibility, and act accordingly, in developing the teaching materials, in implementing the appropriate teaching techniques, and assessing the students' achievement in line with the objectives of teaching English at their schools.
- (3) Parents should be well informed about the function of assessment in learning-process.
- (4) Parent-teacher association should be revitalized.

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