



Exploring Perceptions of English Proficiency Online Testing (EPOT) Among Lecturers and Students: A Review in State Polytechnic Kupang



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Abstract

English proficiency is a critical requirement in Indonesian education and the labor market, with tests such as TOEFL ITP, IELTS, and the English Proficiency Online Test (EPOT) commonly mandated for professional selection processes and graduation. This study explores lecturers' and students' perceptions of EPOT as a graduation requirement at State Polytechnic Kupang and its impact on students' motivation to improve English proficiency. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, collecting data through questionnaires, interviews, and observations of EPOT implementation; data were analyzed using NVivo 15 for thematic mapping and visualization. Findings reveals that students perceive EPOT as a legitimate and measurable graduation requirement, yet technical challenges, financial burdens, and psychological pressures shapes mixed responses. For some, EPOT motivates greater preparation and study; for others, it generates stress and disengagement. Lecturers acknowledge EPOT's administrative and global relevance but raise concerns about test validity, system readiness, fairness, and its psychological impact on students. Institutional stakeholders emphasize balancing technical, administrative, and academic dimensions, while identifying communication and infrastructure as critical challenges. Overall, EPOT is considered acceptable as a graduation requirement, provided that technical systems are strengthened, costs are adjusted, dissemination is improved, and academic support is enhanced to ensure fairness and effectiveness.

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1. Introduction

English proficiency has become one of the most critical requirements in Indonesia, both in education and in the labor market. Increasingly, English skills are regarded as benchmarks of competence and employability. In 2024, the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (KemenPANRB) mandated English proficiency test results—such as TOEFL ITP, predicted scores, or IELTS—for applicants to 61 civil servant positions [1]. This policy reflects a broader trend in which universities and vocational institutions adopt English proficiency tests to ensure that graduates are adequately prepared for workforce demands.

Despite these initiatives, Indonesia continues to rank low in global English proficiency. Survey data from English First (2024), covering 116 countries, placed Indonesia 80th worldwide and 12th among 23 Asian countries [2]. This finding underscores the urgency for higher education institutions to integrate English learning into curricula and to adopt standardized proficiency tests as graduation requirements. Such policies aim to ensure that graduates possess not only disciplinary expertise but also effective communication skills in English [3],[4].

Nevertheless, debates persist regarding the alignment of proficiency tests with educational programs. While tests such as TOEFL and IELTS serve as indicators of competence [5],[6], their design may not fully reflect curricular objectives or vocational contexts. Universities nonetheless view standardized testing as a means of aligning with international academic standards and enhancing recognition by foreign institutions [7].

State Polytechnic of Kupang (PNK), a vocational higher education institution, has embraced this policy direction. Since 2018, PNK has implemented the English Proficiency Test (EPT), and in 2024 introduced the English Proficiency Online Test (EPOT) as a graduation requirement. EPOT remains valid for two years, supporting both academic certification and civil service applications.

The implementation of EPOT has generated mixed responses among administrators, lecturers, and students. While some view it as a tool for curriculum evaluation and motivation, others highlight its psychological, financial, and technical burdens. Similar debates have been documented internationally, including in Taiwan, where English proficiency tests as graduation requirements prompted concerns about exam-oriented learning and student stress [8],[9]. Lecturers in Taiwan acknowledged both positive and negative impacts: positively, the test provided a basis for curriculum evaluation; negatively, it imposed psychological burdens and risked fostering exam-oriented teaching strategies. Students, meanwhile, perceived such policies as significantly influencing their learning efforts, with complaints that graduation delays were unfair given prior completion of English courses.

In Indonesia, studies have reported generally positive student perceptions of online EPT, though technical challenges remain [3]. Other research has emphasized motivational benefits, with students viewing proficiency tests as opportunities to improve language skills [9]. However, these studies often focus narrowly on students or English majors, neglecting broader institutional perspectives and the experiences of non-English majors.

The present study addresses this gap by examining lecturers' and students' perceptions of EPOT as a graduation requirement at PNK. Specifically, it investigates the perceived effectiveness of EPOT, its impact on student motivation, and institutional responses to challenges in its implementation. By employing a qualitative descriptive approach—through questionnaires, interviews, and direct observation—this study captures the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in their natural context. Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 15, supported by visualizations such as word clouds and mind maps, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

This research contributes novelty in three ways. First, it focuses on EPOT as an online graduation requirement, a relatively new policy in Indonesian vocational higher education. Second, it

incorporates multiple stakeholders—students, lecturers, and institutional policymakers—providing a triangulated perspective that extends beyond prior studies limited to student samples. Third, it employs NVivo 15 for thematic analysis and visualization, offering methodological rigor and clarity in identifying patterns of perception.

Taken together, these contributions position the study as a significant addition to the literature on English proficiency testing in higher education. By situating EPOT within the broader context of global competitiveness, national policy, and institutional practice, the research highlights both the opportunities and challenges of implementing standardized language requirements in vocational education.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design with a case study approach. The qualitative descriptive method emphasizes participants' perspectives during data collection and analysis, conducted within their natural context to capture the dynamics of the phenomenon under investigation. The case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the English Proficiency Online Test (EPOT) as implemented at State Polytechnic of Kupang, focusing on its role as a graduation requirement and its impact on students and lecturers.

Primary data were collected directly from participants, including English lecturers, sixth- and eighth-semester students in the applied bachelor program, fourth- and sixth-semester students in the Diploma program, and institutional stakeholders such as the Director, Vice Director for Academic Affairs, the Head of the Language Unit, and the Head of ICT. The research site was State Polytechnic of Kupang, located on Adisucipto Street, Penfui.

Data collection techniques comprised observation and interviews. Observation was conducted during EPOT preparation and implementation, enabling the researcher to record events and behaviors in situ. Passive participation was applied, with the researcher present but not actively involved in activities. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with policymakers, lecturers, and students to obtain insights into perceptions, challenges, and institutional responses.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement with EPOT as lecturers, students, or policymakers. This ensured that the data reflected diverse perspectives relevant to the research objectives.

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo 15 software. The process included transcription of interviews, importing data into NVivo, coding, and thematic analysis to identify patterns and relationships among categories. Visualization tools within NVivo were employed to map findings, which were then systematically presented. This methodological framework provided a comprehensive and rigorous basis for examining perceptions of EPOT and its implications for motivation and institutional policy.

3. Results and Discussions

The study involved interviews with ten students, four lecturers, two program administrators, and three institutional officials at State Polytechnic of Kupang who were directly engaged with the EPOT policy. The interview data obtained from respondents were transcribed verbatim, subsequently imported into NVivo 15, and coded for analysis. A thematic approach was employed, with data visualization presented in the form of word clouds, tree maps, and matrix queries. The demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study are summarized in the table below:

Table 1
Respondent's Demographic

Respondent's ID	Gender	Status
RM01	Female	Student
RM02	Female	Student
RM03	Female	Student
RM04	Female	Student
RM05	Male	Student
RM06	Male	Student
RM07	Male	Student
RM08	Male	Student
RM09	Female	Student
RM10	Female	Student
RD01	Female	Lecturer
RD02		Lecturer
	Female	
RM01		
RD03	Female	Lecturer
RD04	Female	Lecturer
RP01		
	Female	Intitutional Official
RM01		
RP02	Male	Intitutional Official
RP03	Male	Intitutional Official
RPL01	Female	Organizing Committee
RPL02		
	Female	Organizing Committee
RM01		

Student Perceptions of EPOT

Analysis of student responses reveals that EPOT is widely recognized as a formal graduation requirement. Students perceive it as a standardized mechanism that provides measurable outcomes through scores, certificates, and results. While many acknowledge its effectiveness in setting clear benchmarks, others highlight shortcomings related to technical execution and fairness.

Experiences during test implementation were dominated by references to exam questions, duration, and technical conditions. Frequent mentions of *constraints* and *difficulties* point to recurring issues such as unstable internet connections and system errors. These challenges led some students to question whether EPOT accurately reflected their language proficiency.

EPOT's impact on motivation was dual in nature. For some, the test served as a catalyst for more serious preparation, encouraging strategies such as self-study and additional courses. For others,

repeated failures and persistent technical barriers diminished motivation, creating frustration and disengagement.

Financial concerns emerged as a significant theme. Students consistently raised issues about registration fees, retakes, and supplementary courses. While some accepted these costs as part of academic requirements, others viewed them as inequitable and burdensome.

Temporal dynamics also shaped perceptions. Before the test, students focused on preparation; during the test, they emphasized fairness and technical challenges; and approaching graduation, attention shifted to results and certificates. Finally, students expressed strong expectations for clearer communication and socialization. They sought transparency about EPOT's purpose, procedures, and scoring, suggesting improved guidance and institutional communication.

Lecturer Perceptions of EPOT

Lecturers exhibited mixed perceptions, oscillating between support and skepticism. They acknowledged the importance of English proficiency for academic and professional success but questioned EPOT's effectiveness as a graduation requirement.

Lecturers consistently emphasized students as the primary stakeholders affected by EPOT. Their reflections centered on student readiness, ability, and psychological responses. Concerns included misalignment between test content and student competencies, technical challenges of online administration, and limited fairness across diverse student backgrounds.

Lecturers distinguished between EPOT's administrative legitimacy and its academic relevance. While recognizing EPOT as a formal requirement, they questioned whether it genuinely enhanced student learning outcomes. They also highlighted the dual challenges of online systems and student stress, arguing that effectiveness depends not only on test design but also on infrastructure and psychological support.

Impact on Motivation

Students reported feelings of pride, enthusiasm, and accomplishment when achieving satisfactory scores. EPOT was perceived as a meaningful academic milestone, reinforcing confidence and readiness for graduation. It also encouraged new learning strategies, including vocabulary expansion, listening practice, and independent study.

However, financial burdens and technical failures reduced motivation for some students. Stress and frustration were common, particularly among those who struggled to meet requirements despite effort. Lecturers similarly viewed EPOT as both a motivator and a source of psychological strain, emphasizing the importance of institutional support to balance motivation with well-being. Finally, the findings highlight three overarching dimensions of perception, namely administrative legitimacy, academic effectiveness, and practical challenges.

EPOT is broadly acknowledged as a legitimate institutional requirement for graduation, reflecting its integration into the university's academic quality assurance framework. Both students and lecturers generally recognize its role in establishing standardized benchmarks for English language proficiency and ensuring that graduates meet minimum linguistic competencies expected in higher education. Furthermore, the implementation of EPOT is perceived as consistent with international academic practices, where language proficiency assessments are commonly employed as indicators of graduate readiness and academic competitiveness.

Despite its administrative legitimacy, concerns persist regarding the extent to which EPOT accurately assesses students' actual English language proficiency. Participants highlighted several issues, including technical difficulties during test administration, perceived misalignment between test content and students' academic needs, and questions surrounding fairness and accessibility.

These concerns raise doubts about the validity and reliability of EPOT as a comprehensive measure of language competence. Consequently, many lecturers argued that the examination serves a predominantly administrative function, with its contribution to meaningful language assessment remaining subject to critical scrutiny.

The acceptance of EPOT is further influenced by a range of practical considerations that extend beyond its academic objectives. Financial burdens associated with examination fees, technological constraints that affect test performance, and the psychological pressure experienced by students emerged as significant factors shaping participants' perceptions. These challenges often complicate students' engagement with the assessment process and may influence their overall attitudes toward the policy. As a result, students' willingness to accept EPOT largely depends on the extent to which its perceived academic value is balanced against issues of affordability, accessibility, and emotional well-being.

These findings suggest that EPOT functions simultaneously as a motivator and a stressor. For motivated students, EPOT provides clear goals and fosters preparation. For others, financial and technical burdens diminish motivation and create resistance. Lecturers' perspectives reinforce this duality, acknowledging EPOT's administrative importance while questioning its academic relevance.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study suggest several important implications for institutional policy and educational practice. First, enhancing the technical reliability of EPOT administration is essential to ensure fairness, consistency, and credibility. Investments in robust testing infrastructure, stable digital platforms, and effective technical support systems would help minimize disruptions that may compromise the validity of assessment outcomes.

Second, financial considerations should be carefully addressed to promote equitable access to the examination. Reducing testing fees, introducing flexible payment schemes, or providing institutional subsidies for economically disadvantaged students may enhance acceptance and reduce perceptions of financial burden. In addition, universities should strengthen communication strategies by providing clear information regarding the objectives, procedures, and benefits of EPOT. Effective socialization initiatives can reduce uncertainty, increase transparency, and foster a more positive perception of the assessment among students and lecturers.

Finally, the integration of EPOT-related preparation into the academic curriculum could improve students' readiness and reduce examination-related anxiety. Embedding English proficiency development throughout the course of study, rather than concentrating preparation near graduation, would allow students to develop the required competencies gradually. Furthermore, the provision of academic mentoring, preparatory workshops, counseling services, and other support mechanisms may help alleviate psychological stress while enhancing students' confidence and overall performance. Collectively, these measures would contribute to a more effective, accessible, and sustainable implementation of EPOT within higher education institutions.

4. Conclusion

EPOT is perceived as both a legitimate graduation requirement and a contested policy. Students recognize its role in standardizing English proficiency but remain concerned about fairness, cost, and technical reliability. Lecturers acknowledge its administrative importance but question its academic validity. The dual impact on motivation—simultaneously encouraging and discouraging—illustrates the complexity of EPOT's effectiveness.

Ultimately, EPOT's success as a graduation requirement depends on institutional reforms that address technical, financial, and psychological challenges while maintaining its role as a benchmark of English proficiency.

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