

An English Placement Test at Three Different Periods: The Implementation and the Test Administrators' Views

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the practice of an English placement test at one of the English education programs during three different testing periods (before the COVID-19 pandemic, during the pandemic, and after the pandemic). Further, the study sought to investigate the views of the test administrators, mainly focusing on the challenges they faced administering the test during the period mentioned. Using a qualitative case study approach, the researchers gathered the data from the results of observations and final reflections of the test administrators. The findings revealed that the placement test in three different periods applied similar three consecutive stages: the pre-testing stage, the testing day, and the post-testing stage. The goal of the test is also similar to that it is used to gauge the newly intake students entering TBIP. Rather than grouping students for specific classes, the placement test was conducted as a part of need analysis strategies to understand students' English proficiency levels. While the placement tests before and after the pandemic have similarities, especially in preparation activities, the test format, and the test delivery, the placement test during COVID-19 differs. Despite those issues, the placement test administrators believed the test brought additional benefits. In addition to gauging the newly intake students' English proficiency, the placement test was a way to start building positive relationships with students before meeting in an actual class. Hence, the test administrators have mixed feelings upon administering the placement test. Some final thoughts conclude the papers.

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Introduction

Among many kinds of tests, a placement test is one of tests conducted by higher education institutions (HEIs) for their prospective students entering their institutions. Before joining classes, the test serves as an initial assessment of students' competency (Fulcher, 1997) in certain aspects, such as English or Math. The test results assist the institutions in making further decisions related to students' academic matters. Therefore, a placement test becomes

a crucial aspect that affects students' success in pursuing their education at HEIs (Hille & Cho, 2020).

Before the abrupt change due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HEIs conducted placement tests face-to-face (e.g., Green & Lung, 2021; Ockey et al., 2021). However, HEIs shifted the placement test delivery from a traditional face-to-face to an online delivery due to the pandemic. The inability of the institutions to compromise with the situation could hamper students from reaching their entire teaching and learning goals (Daniel, 2020). Hence, research topic related to placement test still becomes the topic that researchers want to explore (e.g., Bahr et al., 2019; Chung et al., 2015).

Past research related to placement testing topics has made significant contributions to the area of education. The results have contributed positively to teaching and learning which include studies that focus on refining the test instruments (Fulcher, 1997; Poel & Weatherly, 1997; Wullur, 2011) and exploring the practical implementation of a placement test (e.g., Chung et al., 2015; Green & Lung, 2021; Ockey et al., 2021). In addition to that, the studies by Fan and Jin (2020) and Fox (2004), for instance, explore factors that affect the validity and reliability of the placement results. Meanwhile, studies by Hille and Cho (2020) and Kwan et al. (2009) are some of the past research that focus on finding strategies to improve the accuracy of the placement test results. However, none of the above studies focus on implementing a placement test at different times, particularly a placement test, to measure the English proficiency of newly admitted students of English Education Program. The quality of English proficiency of prospective English teachers determines the success of their future career as an educator (Masduki et al., 2022), and the mastery of English is one of the required components that serve as teachers' knowledge base to ensure that they can teach English professionally (Renandya et al., 2018). In addition, most previous studies conducted outside Indonesian context and the institutions had experienced for conducting a placement test (e.g., (Green & Lung, 2021; Ockey et al., 2021). Further, a study that focus on the implementation of a placement test that include the views of the test administrators are still dearth as the views becomes a source of inputs to better the quality of a placement test (Ockey et al., 2021).

Henceforth, this study seeks to explore the practice of an English placement test during three different periods – pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, and post-pandemic – at one of the developing English education programs in Indonesia. In addition, this study also targets the view of the test administrators upon administering the placement tests in the contexts mentioned earlier.

Literature review

According to Brown and Priyanvada (2018), a test is a way to measure someone's competence in a given domain. A language placement test is one of a kind that is intended to measure someone's language proficiency before he/ she joins a class. Fulcher (1997) believes that by conducting a placement test, students get the utmost benefit since the test results assist teachers and policymakers in identifying which students need help. In addition, the results help them determine the necessary actions to ensure student's success during their studies (Fan & Jin, 2020). A placement test inappropriately conducted can hamper students' well-being during their study as it can decrease students' motivation and lead to low retention (Kwan et al., 2009). It can even affect students financially as they have to pay for extra unnecessary courses (Hille & Cho, 2020).

There are three themes of the previous research about a placement test. Those themes are about developing instruments and testing them, factors affecting the test results, and the

practice of the test. As for the first theme, a study by Wullur (2011) can serve as an example among many. The study produced the Academic English performance test (AccEPT) instrument to measure English proficiency for incoming college students in Indonesia (Wullur, 2011). Studies by Fulcher (1997), Poel and Weatherly (1997), and Kwan et al. (2009) are the other studies that also explore the development of the test instruments and testing the instrument. Meanwhile, the examples of the second theme of the past research are the studies by Jennings et al. (1999), Hashemi and Zabihi (2011), and Fan and Jin (2020). The studies revealed that the choice of the topic given to test takers (Jennings et al., 1999), learners' attribution (Hashemi & Zabihi, 2011), and knowledge of placement testing of institutions' stakeholders (Fan & Jin, 2020) are factors that affect tests' results. The study by Chung et al. (2015), Papageorgiou and Cho (2014) are the examples of studies that investigate the practice of a placement time. The aforementioned studies have a similarity. The instruments developed, factors affecting tests results, and the practice were investigated and explored suited the period before the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the world experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a shift of research in the area of placement tests. During COVID-19 period, researchers dedicated themselves to study the practice of the test and to examine the changing of test instruments used (e.g., Green & Lung, 2021; Ockey et al., 2021). Taking HEI in the United States (US) as the research context, a study by Green and Lung (2021) described how the University adapted English language placement tests due to the pandemic. They found that the change resulted in some challenges such as practical issues, validity and reliability of the test. The same issues also applies to a study by Ockey et al. (2021). The study that also took place at one of the HEI in the US discussed how the university took a strategy to meet the demand and the pandemic situation. The placement test experienced some changes that raised concerns about the reliability of the test results. Both of the previous study is conducted at institutions that have a long history in placement testing. In other words, they have experienced such kind of test. In fact, they still face some challenges in administering a placement test during the pandemic.

Another similarity that the previous study has in the context of the study. The previous study brings the US as the context of the study. In addition, the research sites involved are universities with satisfactory experience in the history of language testing. The institutions are equipped with and supported by facilities and human resources that help in conducting a placement test (e.g., Green & Lung, 2021). Consequently, the strategy used to handle the issue might not be applicable to another context since a different context brings different characteristics. Further, despite the number of research on language testing, a limited number of studies focus on language testing practice (Alderson, 2010). The current language testing practice, particularly the practice of language placement test that brings Asia as a context is also limited (Fan & Jin, 2020) especially the one that discuss the practice of a placement test before the COVID-19 pandemic, during the pandemic, and after the pandemic. In order to fill these gaps, this paper aims to explore the practice of placement tests conducted at one of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Indonesia. This research seeks to address the practice of a placement test before, during, and after the pandemic and how the test administrators articulate their views upon administering the placement test at the respective site. The study aims to have practical significance for the institutions since the institutions can provide evidence to the stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the policymakers, teachers, and students, about the test. In addition, the result of the study becomes an additional reference to the existing research about the value of a placement test in aiding placement decisions for prospective students admitted at HEIs. The following two research questions are formulated

for this study; the first is how is the practice of the placement test pre, during, and post-pandemic at the site? and the second is what are the test administrators' views upon administering the placement test at the respective site?

Method

A qualitative case study approach was implemented to answer the two research questions (Creswell, 2015). This approach was taken due to the nature of the research where the researchers aimed to get an indept understanding of the pehnomenon (Creswell, 2015). To answer the reserch questions, the data was collected and analyzed qualitatively by observing and collecting reflections from four test administrators. The observations were conducted to capture a broad picture of English placement testing practice aiming to answer research question number one. At the same time, the reflection reports were collected to explore the test administrators' views upon administering the placement test, pointing to research question number two. Results from both were integrated and interpreted synergistically to address the two research questions.

The site of the study

The study took place at an English Education Program (later called TBIP) at one of state universities in Indonesia. The reason why the researchers conducted research in the aforementioned place was due to the phenomenon. The TBIP experienced in conducting a placement test in three different periods: before the COVID-19 pandemic, during and after the Pandemic. In addition, the study focuses on the TBIP particularly the placement tests due to the gain access that researchers got to the TBIP as the researchers were the lecturers at the Program. The TBIP offered a major that prepared its students to be an English teacher for a primary or high school level in Indonesia. The Program prepared curricula aimed to improve students' English proficiency and adequate them with pedagogical-related competency. Before receiving any course, the Program measured its newly admitted students for their English proficiency level through an English placement test.

The three different times of administering the placement test bring different characteristics. Prior to the pandemic, the TBIP conducted an on-site test where the students had to come on a determined schedule given by the Program. The test instrument was a TOEFL-like type of question. However, due to the COVID-19, the TBIP shifted the teaching and learning activities to online learning deliveries. Abiding by the regulations mandated by the University and the Indonesian government, the Program also decided to administer the placement test using an online delivery due to safety reason. Further, when it was declared that COVID-19 changed its status into endemic (Sinto, 2022), the placement test at the respective site was also changed to a face-to-face delivery.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Program accepted two different batches of new students. They were batch 2020 and batch 2021. However, the Program only did the placement test for batch 2021. In other words, it was the first time the Program did a full online placement test for its newly intake students with a different format than the previous placement tests that the Program had ever had. The test results helped the Program map their students' English proficiency levels. By knowing the students' level, the Program could better understand students' backgrounds, especially their language needs.

The participants of the study

Since the study wanted to explore a procedure for conducting tests and dig into the perspective of the test administrators, the study involved participants who administered the tests. In total, this study involved four participants. During the tests, they became a team who was responsible for administering the tests and becoming examiners to assess students' English writing and speaking proficiency. The four participants were lecturers under the same Program. To ensure the participants' privacy, each participant had a pseudonym. For example, participant 1 was labeled as P1. The years of their career at the university varied. When the study was conducted, P1 had been teaching at the university for nine years, while P2 and P3 were in their five years of teaching. On the other hand, P4 was in his/her fourth year of teaching at the respective university.

The research instruments

To collect data, the researchers used two instruments. The first instrument was observations. The observations aim to capture the implementation of the placement test extensively. The time of the observations consists of three different times, and they are before the COVID-19 Pandemic, during the Pandemic, and after the Pandemic. Before the Pandemic, the observations took place during the second week of September 2019. To observe the implementation of administering the placement test during the pandemic, the researchers did observations of the placement test in the second week of September 2021. Then, on the second week of September 2022, the researchers conducted observations on the placement test particularly for the post-pandemic time. The researchers selected September since this month was the time for the test administrators prepared for the placement test and execute it. During the observations, the researchers recorded the data using field notes. For the second instrument, the researchers collected reflection reports. The reports were collected from the participants, the test administrators, on the third week of September 2022 after administering the test. The data from the reports aimed to explore the test administrators' views on overseeing the English placement test.

Data analysis

The researchers gathered the data from the two instruments employed in the study, then analyzed them inductively. First, the researchers read the data taken from the field notes from the observations to find some relevant information related to the study goal. The researchers highlighted some information from the field notes and put them into categories. After that, the researchers formed themes from the categories. For the data taken from the reflection's reports, the researchers repeated the same procedure as in the previous instrument, eliminating unnecessary information and taking some valuable excerpts. The researchers also focused on any new emerging categories that might lead to a new theme. From this analysis, the researchers derived two as the central theme and identified four sub-main themes. These themes are discussed further, focusing on the test administrators' views on the placement test as they experienced it while administering it. The two instruments employed aim to ensure the data's validity as the data taken from two primary resources complement one another. This data triangulation ensures the researchers have a complete picture of the situation investigated.

Result

Based on the data gathered, the researchers divided the findings into two sections to answer the goal of the study, which is how the English placement test was conducted at the research site and the participants' views upon administering the test.

The english placement test for pre-service english teachers before and after the covid-19 pandemic

Prior to and after the COVID-19 Pandemic, TBIP conducted teaching and learning activities using face-to-face delivery. Students came to a physical classroom and met their lecturers and friends in a physical classroom. Even though the university provided a learning management system (LMS), many lecturers used it as a supporting medium. They used the LMS to share materials, deliver online quizzes, or ask students to submit their work.

The traditional way of delivery is also applied to any testing. Students of TBIP received a placement test prior to teaching and learning activities. The tests aimed to measure new intake students' English proficiency levels. The program believed that the test results would help them identify students' needs and assist them in achieving goals set in the curriculum. The test result would also help them identify which skills and language components, such as vocabulary and grammar, needed more attention. In addition, the test result would help lecturers choose, compile, and develop materials for the students.

To administer the test, the lecturers under the TBIP conducted a formal meeting to discuss the placement test. There was no job division in the team. However, each person agreed to have responsibilities such as preparing the attendance list, copying the test handout, preparing for the answer key, compiling the test results, and creating a WhatsApp group. In addition, the discussion resulted in forming test administrators and the test format. The test administrators were the lecturers of the TBIP. The administrators agreed that the test form was a written exam using a multiple-choice test. The questions tested students' listening comprehension, structure and written expressions, and reading comprehension. The students had to complete the test of 140 multiple-choice items within 115 minutes. They consisted of 50 items on the listening part, 40 on the structure and written expression part, and 50 on the reading comprehension part. The items were like those of the TOEFL ITP. The type of test required the administrators to prepare a computer and speakers to play the audio for listening. In addition, they also had to book rooms, arrange the seating, and prepare a copy of the bundle of questions and the answer sheets. After the preparation was completed, the administrator created a schedule for the test.

Before the testing was scheduled, the program put newly admitted students into a WhatsApp group. The group consisted of students and lecturers of TBIP. The group served as a medium to share any information related to academic matters and a forum for students to inquire about any academic matters. The WhatsApp group was also a media for sharing the schedule of the English placement test. The placement test administrators shared the schedule of the test. The schedule contained the day of the test, the duration, the location, the forms of the test, and the tool kits that students needed to bring to the testing place. In addition, a brief notification was given to the students containing information that the test served only to measure initial students' English proficiency. The results would not affect their grades during their study under the TBIP. In addition, the students were informed that the placement test would last only a day, and there was no make-up or retake of the placement test. The testing day was conducted during the first meeting of the teaching and learning activities. The test administrators also asked the head of the TBIP for the number of newly

admitted students in the TBIP who the placement test takers would also be. After knowing the number of test takers, the test administrators prepared copies of the question-and-answer sheets.

During the testing day, the test administrator ensured that the speakers used to play the audio for listening worked properly. On this day, students were only allowed to bring their stationery to the testing site. In each room, two test administrators were responsible for managing the test. The seating arrangement was formed to avoid academic misconduct such as cheating. Students had to sit on their own, and the space between one seat to another was about a meter away. Before starting the test, the administrators explained the structure of the test and the rules during the test. Then they distribute the question-and-answer sheet to each table.

The placement test activity was then concluded with scoring and grading. It was conducted right after the placement test was submitted. Each of the test administrators was responsible for scoring the test takers in the class they were assigned to using the answer key provided. After they scored all of the test takers, they compiled the data to level students' English competence ranging from beginner to advance level. The test administrators admitted that the placement test result was not distributed to students. They said that the test's purpose was part of need analysis strategies of students' English proficiency level. The test was not used to place students in a certain class, but just understanding their English level. The results were also distributed among lecturers teaching the newly admitted students. In other words, there was no further implications that arise from the test results eventhough the name was a placement test.

The english placement test for pre-service english teachers during the covid 19 pandemic

The English placement test during the COVID-19 Pandemic had a different format compared to the period before the pandemic and after the pandemic. The differences mainly cover the test delivery, the test formats, and how the program administrators ran the test. However, the purpose of the test is the same. It is not for grouping students to a certain class. The results help lecturers to understand the newly intake students' English proficiency level. The details taken from the data are given below.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Indonesia in early 2020, the Indonesian government instructed that teaching-learning activities had to be delivered online. The TBIP also followed the instruction and the newly intake students' batch 2020 had their classes online. At that time, the 2020 intake students of TBIP did not do any English placement tests. The reason why there were no placement tests administered was due to abrupt shift of teaching learning delivery that all the lecturers had to prepare for the massive change of teaching delivery from traditional face-to-face to online delivery. However, the head of TBIP gave freedom to lecturers teaching the newly admitted students to conduct tests for their own classes and the test results were not shared among lecturers.

In 2021, the Program admitted new students. They had their learning activities entirely online. However, the story was different for the placement test. To uphold the belief that assessment could bring better learning outcomes, the Program decided to administer a placement test for newly admitted students in batch 2021. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the TBIP could not do an on-site placement test. As for the solution, the placement test was delivered online for students admitted in batch 2021. Before the testing day, the lecturers under the Program conducted online meetings to discuss the placement test issues. The Program decided to form a team of four lecturers in the meeting to administer the placement

test. The team shared responsibilities for everything related to the placement test for the newly admitted students. Their responsibilities ranged from preparing test items, scheduling the tests, sharing information with the test takers, and reporting the test. To help the coordination, the team created a WhatsApp group to discuss the placement test-related issue further.

The test administrators had to take action since the time to prepare for the test items was inadequate. The team agreed to use an existing test item instead of developing new test items from zero. The team worked on finding suitable test items online. Among the free-to-use tests, the team finally agreed to use the Outcome test package published by Cengage that could be accessed in this website <https://www.eltoutcomes.com/>. The reasons for using the Outcome test package were due to the availability of the test items online and they were free to use. The Outcome also provided a bundle of test items that could test takers' competency in writing and speaking English. The test package also explained how to administer the test and a rubric that helped with the scoring. The team decided to use the Outcome for the placement test in order to get a whole picture of students' English proficiency.

After selecting the testing instrument, the team shared responsibilities. Since the tests were online, one of the team members transferred questions to two forms of Google Forms online survey. That person was also responsible for setting the test on schedule. However, among vocabulary and grammar, writing, and speaking test, only the first two test items were transferred into online forms. The speaking test was conducted online synchronous meeting. Since the speaking test required to be conducted via a face-to-face meeting, the team also scheduled an online synchronous meeting for students and examiners to meet.

The team set some rules for the test to ensure that the results reflected the test takers' real English proficiency. Each student only had one attempt to complete the test, and there was no make-up schedule though there was an internet connection problem that prohibited the test takers from submitting and presenting during the test. In addition to that, the team set the duration for each test. The vocabulary and grammar test duration were 30 minutes, the writing test was 60 minutes, and the oral test was at least five to ten minutes for each test taker.

The outcome placement test package consists of several items that tested vocabulary, grammar, oral proficiency, and writing skills. The vocabulary and grammar part consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions. Meanwhile, the oral proficiency placement test of the Outcome contained prompt questions to assess the test takers' English speaking ability. For the writing placement test, the test takers were provided with some topics and selected one of them to write a composition.

Due to the nature of the test that requires examiners to assess the test takers' speaking and writing ability, the test administrators who were also English lecturers at TBIP had double roles. In addition to being the test administrators, they also became the test examiners. In total, there were six examiners who were assigned into four classes. They were Ak, Bk, Ck, and Dk where each class consisted of at least 20 students (82 students in total). Two examiners scored students' writing and their speaking ability for each class. Since there was a lack of human resources, two interpreters were assigned to assess two classes. Each examiner scored the test result based on the rubric provided in the Outcome placement test package. The scoring results between the two examiners assigned under the same class were combined and further discussed among them to determine the students' English proficiency level. When there was a difference, the team decided to revisit the test results other than retest students due to the time constraint. When that happened, the examiners would also ask for

another examiner to get involved in revisiting the test results before a final decision of scoring happened.

After selecting the test package, the team worked on the placement test schedule. Since the test measure different English skills and sub-skills, the team conducted the placement test in two different days. Students had the vocabulary, grammar, and writing test in one day. It was a week before the teaching and learning activities began. During these tests, students were at home and accessed Google Forms remotely. There was no camera that monitored their activities. Meanwhile, the speaking test was on a day during the first week of students' teaching learning meeting. Due to the limited personnel and the number of test takers, the speaking test was conducted in two different shifts. In each shift, the examiners had to test 10 tests takers for their English-speaking proficiency. The speaking test was conducted online face-to-face on the given schedule.

After administering the test, the test administrators resumed their activities by conducting a meeting. The meeting was held after the examiners completed all the scoring. The meeting conducted online synchronously was aimed at gathering the results of the placement test as well as discussing it. They also did an evaluation upon administering the placement test.

Some final thoughts of the english placement test for pre-service english teachers: administrators' voice challenges faced while administering the placement test

The test administrators encountered no substantial problems executing the placement test before and after the pandemic. They believed that face-to-face delivery was the main factor that supported them in conducting the test. However, things were different when they had to shift the test delivery to online.

The first challenge encountered by the test administrators was selecting the instrument for the placement test. The purpose of the placement test was to get the whole picture of students' English proficiency levels. In order to capture that, there should be instruments that could cater to the needs. Since the time for developing instruments was not possible due to time constraints, the only option that the team had was to use the existing instrument. After evaluating some ready-made instruments, the team agreed to use the Outcome placement test package. The Outcome placement test package was actually a test packaged provided by the publisher of the Outcome books. The package itself was aimed to measure English proficiency level of the the potential book users' level before using the Outcome books. Even though students of the program did not use the book, the result of the tests using the test package gave insight into students' English proficiency levels.

Another challenge faced when administering the test was the testing delivery. The placement test was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this condition, the teaching and learning processes were conducted online. It pushed the team to think about the delivery system of the placement test. In addition, since the placement test package could not be delivered online, the team had to transfer the questions into online forms to make them accessible. The team created online forms via Google Forms and set the forms on schedule. The tests that were delivered via google forms were the vocabulary and grammar tests and the writing test. Meanwhile, for the oral proficiency test, the team used Google Meeting for a face-to-face meeting. This media was selected because it was free to use and does not consume too much Internet data package.

However, the delivery system affected the test results' accuracy since the team needed more control over students. While doing the test, the test administrators believed that there

were many possibilities for students to cheat, such as opening a dictionary, asking for someone's assistance, using an online translation machine, and many other forms. The below excerpt from Participant 2 (P2) is an example of a statement that depicts the issue.

My concern in administering the placement test during the pandemic was related to the accuracy when I assessed my students' speaking performances. I was worried whether I judged their speaking ability accurately since the online test made me unable to trust 100% whether I myself did it fairly or not. (P2)

The only control that the team had was setting the duration of the tests at a limited time and asking students to agree with certain terms and conditions. In the GoogleForms distributed during the test, they had to answer 'Yes' to a question asking that they would not do cheating during the tests. The question was given along with the placement test questions. In addition, the team has shared with students that the test results would not affect their grades on any courses they took during the semester running whatsoever. Better control of the validity of the test result happened to the oral proficiency test since students had to do an online, face-to-face meeting with the interviewers.

The team had to face another challenge while administering the test. The team admitted that the internet connection sometimes hindered the flow of the tests.

Most of my concern related to the test was about the internet connection. As the test was online, both the examiners and the test takers must have reasonable internet access (P. 3).

... Next, is the quality of the internet connection of the students. Some of them live in rural areas; thus, when we did the online speaking test, sometimes, because of a bad connection, the video and audio were not clear enough. (P1)

Since the test was conducted online in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic, the test takers were off campus. They relied on the Internet connection where the internet connection was sometimes unstable. These conditions caused some technical problems. Some students needed help submitting the tests, especially the grammar and vocabulary tests. As a result, they got zero points for the respective test. The internet connection also became the most significant hurdle during the oral proficiency test. The problematic connection could have helped the flow of the interviews. The interrater often lost students while speaking or the other way around.

The problem appeared when I had to call them one by one to join the Google meet via WhatsApp group. Some students came on time, but some have yet to respond directly after being mentioned in the WhatsApp group. Thus, the test took longer than I expected. In one session, students, it was supposed to be only 5-7 minutes, but because of this problem, it took longer, maybe more than 10 minutes. Indirectly, it will make the following students wait longer (P.5).

The team admitted that the schedule for administering the test during the COVID-19 pandemic could have been better. The new students batch 2021 did the vocabulary and grammar test on Saturday. During that day, students were still doing their academic orientation. They had to complete some projects as part of the tasks during the orientation. In

addition, students were busy preparing themselves for the semester as they were new to the university environment. Then, they had another test in different day. That counts two days of test. Therefore, the team believed that the placement test in the future use could only be in one day for time efficiency. Ultimately, the future test should be scheduled two weeks before teaching and learning activities begin. By doing so, the team expected that students as the test takers could perform maximally for the placement test.

The team learned that the test instruments should meet the needs. The test instruments should be in line with the purpose of conducting the test and the situation when the tests were administered. The Program used the test package to measure students' English proficiency. However, since the test package was ready-made, the team initiated to develop the test items following the Program's needs and students' backgrounds. The existing test package, the Outcomes, did not test listening skills. Students' listening skill was not directly assessed as the skill was embedded during speaking test. Students responded to the prompt questions given by the examiners. Upon this issue, the team believed that they needed to conduct a need analysis to select a test package that could test students' English skills. The statement from Participant 2, for instance, explains best.

What needs to be improved is the formulation or setting of the test that can measure the actual ability of test takers and the ability of the lecturers to assess them. Some students missed the test, and we also had to deal with noise during the speaking test. (P.2)

The team also agreed that they should consider the delivery system for the future placement test as it might affect the test result. When the data was taken, Google Forms was the primary delivery tool for the tests, especially for grammar, vocabulary, and writing tests. Due to the asynchronous test, the administrators had a minimal control over students during the tests. There was a possibility that students cheated during the tests, which affected the accuracy of them. Therefore, the team should find an alternative way to address this issue to ensure that the test results did portray the test takers' English competency. The statement from Participant 4 is an example of the test administrators' concern regarding the accuracy of the test results.

Administering placement test held online during the covid19 pandemic really concern me. Since the test uses an online platform, I wanted to know if it accurately reflects the student's English skill/ level. In this case, I could not monitor/control them directly like in the offline classroom (P.4).

Apart from all the challenges, the placement test administrators' team still has a positive attitude in administering the test, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. With all of the limitations, hindrances, and lack of experience in administering an online test, they believe that the placement test becomes a way to get to know their students. They also believe that administering the online placement test brings a good experience in their career. The below excerpts depict the participants' views.

Even though I faced some problems during this online placement test, it was better than my previous experience in doing the same placement test. (P.4)

I was happy with our placement test, especially the one-on-one speaking test. I knew every single student in my future classes. (P.3)

My impression of this placement test is that it is very good and different from the previous placement tests... one example is using the TOEFL-like test... (P.1)

In summary, the test placement test administrators admitted that they encountered some difficulties administering the placement test, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges they had were about choosing appropriate instruments for the test, the test delivery, the accuracy of test results, the internet connection, and the test schedule. However, apart from the hindrances when administering the placement test due to the pandemic, the test administrators still had a positive view upon administering the test. The placement test they administered allowed them to know their students and gave them a new experience of administering a test compared to their past experience of administering a placement test.

Discussion

This study aims to explore the practice of a placement test at TBIP, a program that prepared students for their future careers as English for EFL/ ESL teachers before, during, and after the pandemic. In addition, the study also seeks to understand the test administrators' articulate view upon administering the placement test at the respective site. The findings revealed that the placement test in three different periods applied similar three consecutive stages: the pre-testing stage, the testing day, and the post-testing stage. The goal of the test is also similar to that it is used to gauge the newly intake students entering TBIP. Rather than grouping students for specific classes, the placement test was conducted as a part of need analysis strategies to understand students' English proficiency levels. While the placement test before and after the pandemic have similarities, especially in preparation activities, the test format, and the test delivery, the placement test during the COVID-19 is different. The placement test during this period used different formats and deliveries due to the situation. Regarding the views of the test administrators, they found some challenges in conducting the placement test, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, they still showed positive views upon administering the test.

The language placement test to measure the TBIP students' English proficiency consisted of three stages. Regardless of the period of conducting the placement test, the test always began with the first stage, the preparation stage. This stage consisted of several activities, such as forming a team to administer the placement test, determining the type of test format and delivery, and preparing documents, tools, and media needed for the placement test. After the preparation stage, the next stage was the testing day, where the students got a placement test. Since the test administrators also served as proctors and examiners, they had double responsibilities during the test day. After the testing, the test administrators scored and graded before sharing the results among lecturers under TBIP. The data showed that the test administrators tried their best to carefully plan the placement test regardless of the condition though they were overwhelmed, especially during the pandemic. Careful planning becomes a barometer for the success of the placement test, ensuring the test takers' fairness and validity of the test result (Ockey et al., 2021). As stated by Fulcher (1997), invalid test results jeopardize students academically during their studies. In addition, the purpose of the placement test is also the same. Even though the term used for the test is a placement test, the main goal of the test is more on measuring the English proficiency of the newly admitted students in the English education program. The goal was to understand students' English and give the lecturers background knowledge to decide on some necessary actions to boost

students' English mastery at only a classroom level. This idea resonated Hille and Cho (2020), who viewed that the result of a placement test assisted in matching students' needs and the level of instruction to reach maximum learning outcomes.

The significant differences among the three different periods of administering the placement test are the test format and delivery which affect the test results. The placement test before and after the COVID-19 Pandemic used a sit-in type of test where test takers came to a testing site on a given schedule. Two proctors monitored the test takers during the test. It prevented the test takers from cheating. In other words, the test result accurately reflected the test takers' competence. However, since the test's purpose is gauging the test takers' English proficiency, the test results might not represent a whole picture of the test takers' English proficiency due to the test format. Before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the TBIP used a TOEFL-like test format that the test content consisted of listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. The test contained no writing or speaking test. Speaking and writing are skills that cannot be left behind when measuring language competency (Powers, 2010). Therefore, the results might not best reflect the test takers' actual English proficiency level. Even though there is much debate about using the TOEFL ITP-like format, the content and the format are still used by some institutions to measure someone's English proficiency (e.g., Papageorgiou & Cho, 2014). The possible justification why the Program used the test, as mentioned earlier, was due to the placement test purpose, which was only for initial understanding of the newly admitted students' English proficiency and for internal use only. Another possibility of using the TOEFL ITP-like is due to the practicality and affordability of the test (Golubovich et al., 2018).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the TBIP used a different test format and delivery for the placement test. The test administrators used the Outcome placement test package, which was readily available and could be downloaded online. The test package contained a grammar and vocabulary test, a speaking test, and a writing test. While the speaking test was conducted via a one-on-one interview format, the writing test was given through a construct-response format. What the Program did during the pandemic was nearly replicate the actual life use of English where the language skills and components were involved. As stated by Wullur (2011), a proficiency test's testing procedures should be as similar as possible to the kinds of contextualized language processing. However, the test package was lacking in measuring the test takers' reading and listening skills which also affected the result of the tests in giving an overall representation of the test takers' English proficiency. However, the possible justification why the Program used the test as mentioned above was due to the availability of the test online and the situation at that time, possibly hindering them from designing a test suit with the condition. In addition, reading and listening skills were embedded in the vocabulary and grammar tests, writing, and speaking tests. The test takers' listening skill was seen, for instance, during the speaking test as the test takers listened to the examiners before answering questions given. Meanwhile, the test takers' reading skill was seen when reading the instructions and questions given during the writing and grammar and vocabulary tests. However, each skill should be tested differently to reflect the actual English competency of the test takers (Golubovich et al., 2018). Another possible reason the Program had different test specifications during the pandemic is the limited budget for conducting a placement test. In addition, the lack of language assessment literacy forced them to adopt or use free-to-use instruments. Even though this decision is risky for the test results, this is the possible solution under the above circumstances.

In addition to that, the test delivery during the COVID-19 Pandemic might present a threat to the validity of the test. During the pandemic, the test was conducted online. The grammar, vocabulary, and writing tests were given using Google Forms, which the test takers could access at their designated places. The test administrators could not monitor the test takers while doing the test as no cameras monitored them. This situation gave the test takers opportunities to cheat. In addition, the internet connection affected the flow of the online synchronous speaking test as the connection hindered the test takers from having smooth speaking, which affected their performance. Those situations pose a challenge to the validity of the test results. However, the issue of test validity was unavoidable during that period. The validity issue becomes one of the issues that arise from using a digital type of test delivery and still being a subject of review (Isbell & Kremmel, 2020). The decision from the test administrators to ask the test takers to sign an online consent form in GoogleForms saying that the test takers would not cheat during the test might not be sufficient to prevent them from doing so. However, the decision was still valued as a precautious strategy (Ockey et al., 2021) that the administrators had to prevent the test takers from doing cheating.

The findings also revealed the test administrators' views upon administering the placement test. The test administrators revealed that they face challenges, mainly while administering the test during the pandemic. Those challenges include selecting appropriate instruments, determining the delivery mode and the test schedule, and accessing a better internet connection. These challenges could affect the validity of the test results, which were also faced and became concerns to some other institutions (e.g., Green & Lung, 2021; Ockey et al., 2021), mainly due to the pandemic. However, HEIs can learn from a meaningful context by administering the test. As Ockey et al. (2021) stated, the experience also allows them to find and explore various options that suit the situations. That way, they can prepare for better placement testing and deepen their literacy about language assessment (LAL) (Fan & Jin, 2020).

In addition to the above challenge, the test administrators also voice their views on another challenge. They admitted that the situation pressured them to adjust their language testing practice. They needed to gain experience in language placement testing, especially for online delivery. The support from the institutions – such as budgeting and facilities, was not seen in the data. This study resonates with the previous research that time constraints, financial supports, and inexperience in language testing are some challenges faced by HEIs in placement testing (Fan & Jin, 2020). Fan and Jin (2020) further asserted that supports in any form from the Institutions was needed, and they should also force for LAL program to familiarize all the stakeholders involved and related to the placement testing to ensure the quality of the placement test.

This study also reveals that the placement test gave the lecturer extra benefit. The lecturers became the test administrators and interpreters for the students they would teach. As a result, they had a chance to know their students' English proficiency before the class to determine the necessary decisions to help students reach their full potential during their studies. As stated by Hille and Cho (2020), the placement test result enabled teachers to analyze students' needs for practical instruction to attain the maximum outcome of teaching and learning. In addition, these responsibilities allowed them to meet their students before meeting in the class. Being the test administrator and interrater gives lecturers' extra responsibility, yet the initial meeting with the students during the test can build initial bonding with the students. The previous study has revealed that bonding between students and teachers fosters students' academic success (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014)

regardless of the level of education and context. In this study, the placement test, where lecturers also serve as test administrators, can be a strategy to create initial bonding with the students.

Conclusion

This study aims to uncover the practice of administering an English placement test at three different periods to newly admitted students in a Program where the graduates are expected to become English teachers. The study also seeks to reveal the test administrators' views upon conducting the test at the site above. The study revealed that the placement test was conducted following three stages to ensure the quality of the test. The study also found other dimensions of a placement test – such as test specifications, test purpose, content, and test format – which vary following the testing period. Meanwhile, concerning the view of the test administrators, this study finds mixed feelings about conducting the placement test at a different period. Though the test administrators faced technical and non-technical issues, they still believe that the placement test brings benefits, especially in creating an initial bonding between lecturers and students before meeting in a classroom.

This current study included a few limitations. The study was conducted at one Program involving a relatively small sample size. Hence, caution needs to be exercised upon the findings for generalizability and might not suit other universities due to different situations and contexts. Therefore, future studies must take the placement test in other contexts and situations. Then, this study took data from the result of observations and self-reflections from the test administrators, where data triangulation was attained. Meanwhile, the researchers needed to gain and analyse other data sources such as the placement test run down, the sample of placement test papers, and the sample of the tests. Therefore, future research should conduct a similar study involving the sources above, which can strengthen the findings' generalizability.

This study contains some practical implications for placement testing, particularly language testing practice. In conjunction with the study findings, HEIs should plan their placement testing practice carefully, especially in developing or designing test instruments and providing programs as the follow-up actions upon the test results. The plan should also meet the needs and work in any situation. They should also seek advice from or collaborate with subject matter experts in language testing options, the ideal practice of placement testing, and language testing in particular. Otherwise, they might want to use commercial tests for the placement in which the tests' credibility is ensured (Poel & Weatherly, 1997). It is expected that this strategy helps the institutions to achieve a high level of validity and reliability of the test results. Finally, assigning lecturers both as test administrators and interraters in a placement test give them extra work since they have double roles. However, this strategy can be an option for HEIs with limited resources, particularly human resources and budgeting. In addition, this strategy can also foster a student-lecturer relationship for the success of students' academic careers at HEIs.

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