

## Challenging Neo-Colonialism in Language Testing: The Development and Impact of Indonesia's Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP)

**Masduki<sup>1</sup>**

Muhammadiyah University of Malang, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>  
 Email Correspondence: masdki@yahoo.com

### Abstract

**Background:**

In today's globalized world, neo-colonialism exerts significant influence, particularly in political and economic spheres. This influence extends to English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, where the hegemony of a specific language test system has resulted in its overuse for multiple purposes.

**Methodology:**

This research employs a quantitative approach to design the Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) for Indonesian non-native speakers, focusing on academic, business, and general settings. The four-step process includes participant selection, data collection, expert judgment, and test try-outs.

**Findings:**

The study results indicate that TAEP items are acceptable, with a high validity of .98 and reliability of .93. Four poor items require revision, while others effectively distinguish between good and poor test-takers. TAEP's content is balanced and relevant for assessing proficiency in academic, business, and general English.

**Conclusion:**

TAEP, meeting language test criteria and legally certified, has been utilized nationally and internationally, including by Bank of Indonesia, the Financial Service Authority of Indonesia (OJK), and Erasmus Mundus. This contributes to Indonesia's pursuit of independence from modern colonization.

**Originality:**

This study innovatively explores the underexamined relationship between neo-colonialism and language testing, addressing issues such as overdependence on specific tests, national spending burdens, and neglect of local linguistic and cultural contexts.

**Keywords** : TAEP; neo-colonialism; language test.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Neo-colonialism is a significant force in the modern world, with its primary objective being the exertion of political and economic control (Antwi-Boateng, 2017; Nkrumah & Nkrumah, 1965). The aforementioned phenomenon has become pervasive in diverse facets of worldwide communities, encompassing the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT) within the Indonesian context. The Indonesian ELT sector exhibits a manifestation of neo-colonial influence through the prevalence of a particular language testing system, resulting in an excessive dependence on it for various purposes (Budairi, 2019; Kirana & Methitham, 2019). The reliance on this examination has led to notable economic consequences in terms of the country's expenditures (Canagarajah, 1999).

There is a pressing necessity for a locally tailored standardized English language assessment to emancipate the Indonesian English Language Teaching (ELT) industry from the influence of neo-colonialism. The creation of such an assessment would not solely advance academic self-sufficiency, but also cultivate a fairer and regionally pertinent methodology towards linguistic evaluation (Mappiasse & Sihes, 2014; Shohamy, 2001). The Language Center at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang has taken the initiative to create the Test of Academic English Proficiency in order to address this requirement. (TAEP). The present article delves into the developmental process of the Teaching Anti-racism through Education Policy (TAEP) and its potential to mitigate neo-colonial practices in the field of education.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the prevalence of neo-colonialism in education, specifically in the field of English Language Teaching (Araujo, 2019; Canagarajah, 1999; Meadows, 2020; Pennycook, 2001; Sharma, 2018; Shohamy, 2001). Scholars have posited that the worldwide prevalence of the English language and the enforcement of specific assessment frameworks have sustained a pattern of linguistic and cultural imperialism, placing non-native speakers at a disadvantage and marginalizing indigenous languages and cultures (Canagarajah, 1999; Sharma, 2018). The prevalence of a particular language has resulted in the excessive reliance on certain English language assessments, thereby imposing an unwarranted financial strain on domestic education funding and perpetuating the power dynamics that are inherent in neo-colonial associations (Meadows, 2020; Pennycook, 2001).

The prevalence of neo-colonialism in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia is apparent through the extensive utilization of particular language assessments

for diverse objectives, ranging from admission into universities to determining eligibility for employment. The exclusive dependence on a solitary testing mechanism not only affects the financial outlay of the country but also disregards the distinct linguistic and cultural circumstances of the populace in Indonesia (Canagarajah, 1999; Kachru, 1992; Meadows, 2020). Consequently, there exists an urgent requirement for an alternative evaluation mechanism that effectively tackles these issues while upholding elevated levels of appraisal.

The TAEP is an innovative language testing method in Indonesia that has the potential to reduce the influence of neo-colonialism in the ELT industry. The TAEP initiative endeavors to create a standardized language assessment that takes into account the distinct educational and cultural factors present in Indonesia. The objective is to offer a more just and culturally appropriate substitute to current language tests. The present assessment instrument has undergone a meticulous process of item development, expert evaluation, and validation, thereby ensuring its suitability and dependability as a testing tool (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Hughes, 2003).

In recent years, researchers have conducted inquiries into diverse facets of English Language Teaching (ELT), such as the influence of worldwide language evaluations on pedagogical methodologies and achievements (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 2016; Meadows, 2020). Scholars have posited that the extensive utilization of the English language and the incorporation of specific evaluation models have sustained linguistic and cultural imperialism, resulting in the unfavorable treatment of individuals who are not native speakers and the marginalization of indigenous languages and cultures (Kirkpatrick, 2016; Meadows, 2020). The existing studies have contributed significant insights into the outcomes of neo-colonialism in the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT). However, there exists a research void concerning the creation and execution of alternative, culturally appropriate language evaluations that could potentially mitigate the impacts of neo-colonialism in particular settings, such as Indonesia (Zein et al., 2020). Future research endeavors may potentially enhance the current body of literature and offer pragmatic remedies for advancing linguistic and cultural inclusivity, while simultaneously cultivating educational self-determination in the field of English Language Teaching.

The subsequent sections of this manuscript are structured in the following manner. The introductory segment presents a concise outline of the notion of neo-colonialism and its ramifications for language assessment, emphasizing the necessity of alternative methodologies that cater to indigenous circumstances. The subsequent segment delineates the

developmental trajectory of TAEP, encompassing its theoretical underpinnings, item generation, and validation protocols, evincing its capacity to function as a dependable and culturally appropriate evaluative instrument. The third section of the paper outlines the application of TAEP in diverse academic and vocational contexts, demonstrating its efficacy in tackling the obstacles presented by neo-colonialist practices within the Indonesian English Language Teaching industry. Ultimately, the article culminates with a comprehensive analysis of the ramifications of the Test of English for Academic Purposes (TAEP) on the forthcoming language assessment practices in Indonesia and other regions, in addition to plausible prospects for future investigations.

This article makes a contribution to the expanding literature on the impact of neo-colonialism in education by presenting the development, validation, and implementation of TAEP. Additionally, it offers a practical solution for mitigating the effects of neo-colonialism. The implications of the study extend beyond the Indonesian context and have relevance for other nations facing comparable challenges in the domain of language assessment. The aspiration of this study is to stimulate additional inquiries regarding the creation and implementation of language assessments that are both regionally applicable and uniform, which foster self-governance in education and oppose neo-colonialist impacts.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this study is to conduct quantitative Research and Development with the purpose of creating a Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) that is both balanced and relevant for non-native speakers of Indonesian origin in diverse environments (Borg & Gall, 1983). The research methodology comprises of four distinct stages, namely participant selection, data collection, expert judgment, and test try-out. The study involved the categorization of participants into two distinct groups. The pilot study consisted of 744 university students in their sixth semester, while the main trial involved 1,030 graduates from various universities.

The process of data collection entailed the examination of quantitative data obtained from the test try-outs. The objective was to ascertain the item facility, discriminating power, validity, and reliability of the data (Scheerens et al., 2003). The utilization of questionnaires to gather qualitative data yielded supplementary insights. The study sought the input of a language testing professor and colleagues with doctoral degrees in education and applied linguistics to obtain expert judgment. The experts were consulted on matters related to text selection, item writing, and item analysis (Cohen, 1994). The examination procedure

consisted of a preliminary investigation and a primary experiment, in which examinees were allocated a total of 60 minutes to complete the grammar and reading comprehension portions, with additional time granted as necessary.

The process of analyzing data entailed the computation of item facility through the utilization of Cohen (1994) formula, as well as the evaluation of item discrimination according to Ebel & Frisbie (1972) classification. The empirical validity of the test was established through a comparison of the test results with students' reading comprehension scores obtained from their instructors and pre-existing standardized test scores Cohen (1994). The assessment of reliability was conducted through the utilization of the Kuder Richardson (KR21) formula.

### 3. FINDINGS

The findings of this research offer significant perspectives on the efficacy of the Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) in evaluating the linguistic competencies of Indonesian individuals who are not native speakers. The examination of the psychometric characteristics of the assessment, such as item facility, item discrimination, validity, and reliability, indicates its capacity as a strong tool for assessing English language proficiency in academic, professional, and everyday contexts.

Table 1. Summary of TAEP's Psychometric Properties

NO	Property	Criteria	Results	Interpretation
1	Item Facility (IF)	.20 to .70	.21 to .40	Acceptable
2	Item Discrimination	Ebel's classification	4 poor items	Revision needed
3	Validity	Pearson's r	.98	Very high
4	Reliability	KR21	.93	High
5	Item Facility (IF)	.20 to .70	.21 to .40	Acceptable

The IF values computed in the study fall within the range of .21 to .40, which is indicative of acceptable levels of item difficulty as per the recommended criteria. All items have values within the range of .20 to .70. Ebel's classification scheme identified a total of four items that were deemed to be of poor quality and in need of revision. The remaining items, however, were found to be effective in their ability to differentiate between test takers who performed well and those who performed poorly.

The test's validity was determined to be significantly high (Pearson's  $r = .98$ ) based on its correlation coefficient with established measures. This implies that the TAEP aptly

evaluates the targeted area of assessment. In addition, the internal consistency or reliability of the test was evaluated using the Kuder Richardson (KR21) formula, yielding a coefficient of .93, which exceeds the suggested reliability of .90 proposed by (Hughes, 2003). The robustness of TAEP is confirmed by the high reliability index.

In order to guarantee the pertinence of TAEP's content to its designated objectives, the examination items encompass a diverse range of subjects spanning academic, commercial, and universal contexts. Bachman & Palmer (1996) assert that for a language test to be effective for its intended objectives, there must be observable correspondences between test performance and language usage in non-test contexts. The content presented is both balanced and diverse, accurately reflecting the real-life situations and challenges encountered by individuals who are not native English speakers in these particular contexts.

The Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) exhibits potential as a dependable and authentic tool for evaluating the English language proficiency of non-native speakers from Indonesia. This conclusion is drawn based on the available evidence. The methodology employed in this study was thorough and encompassing, encompassing participant selection, data collection, expert judgment, and test try-outs. The resulting test demonstrated acceptable item facility values, high validity, and high reliability. The analysis revealed the presence of four deficient items that necessitate modification. However, the general outcomes of the study lend credence to the efficacy of the test in differentiating between proficient and unskilled examinees.

To summarize, the Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) exhibits promise as a dependable and sound tool for evaluating the English language proficiency of non-native speakers from Indonesia. The employed methodology in the study has yielded a test that exhibits acceptable item facility values, as well as high levels of validity and reliability. While four items were found to exhibit poor discrimination, the overall findings provide evidence for the efficacy of the test in differentiating between individuals who perform well and those who perform poorly. Subsequent investigations ought to concentrate on enhancing the precision of these components and investigating the suitability of the examination in diverse settings and demographics.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The study on the Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) aimed to evaluate the English language proficiency of non-native speakers from Indonesia. The results indicate favorable outcomes with regards to the validity, reliability, item facility, and item discrimination of the test. The ensuing discourse underscores the principal discoveries and ramifications of the investigation, along with conceivable directions for subsequent inquiry.

The TAEP demonstrated a high level of validity, as evidenced by a Pearson correlation coefficient of .98. This indicates a robust association between the test scores and

established assessments of English language proficiency (Sanderson, 2010). The outcome of this study provides evidence in favor of the argument that the Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) accurately evaluates the targeted construct. This finding is consistent with the viewpoint expressed by Bachman & Palmer (1996) that language assessments ought to correspond with language usage in real-life contexts beyond the testing environment. The TAEP's high level of validity can be attributed to the meticulous curation and creation of test items that encompass a broad spectrum of subjects spanning academic, business, and general domains. This methodology guarantees that the examination sustains its pertinence and practicality in authentic scenarios, which constitutes a crucial facet of the examination's validity (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

According to the research, the TAEP exhibits a notable degree of internal consistency, as evidenced by a reliability score of .93. The aforementioned value exceeds the reliability threshold of .90 as proposed by (Hughes, 2003). This indicates that the test is a reliable measure of English language proficiency. The attainment of high reliability is of utmost importance in guaranteeing the precision and consistency of test scores (Hughes, 2003). The dependable consistency of the TAEP can be ascribed to the meticulous approach utilized throughout the test creation procedure, encompassing the selection of participants, gathering of data, consultation with experts, and conducting of test trials.

Regarding item facility, the TAEP's IF values were computed to range from .21 to .40, which are deemed satisfactory (Sanderson, 2010). The present discovery implies that the test items are appropriately calibrated for the target examinees, as they do not appear to be excessively facile or arduous. Ensuring suitable levels of item difficulty is crucial in order to furnish assessments that are both meaningful and precise in gauging the abilities of those taking the test (Sanderson, 2010; Scheerens et al., 2003).

The study has identified four items that exhibited poor discrimination, implying that these items were ineffective in distinguishing between test takers who performed well and those who performed poorly. The TAEP data was subjected to Ebel & Frisbie (1972) classification in order to assess item discrimination. The findings indicate that four items exhibited poor discrimination and therefore require revision to enhance their efficacy. The discernment of these items underscores the significance of continual test creation and assessment to guarantee that test items are efficacious in distinguishing among examinees with diverse levels of aptitude (Ebel & Frisbie, 1972).

The implications of the TAEP study have broader implications that transcend the confines of the Indonesian context. The significance of English as a worldwide language has increased, thereby making it imperative for educational institutions, policymakers, and businesses to have access to dependable and authentic assessments of English language proficiency. The Test of English for Academic Purposes (TAEP) has the potential to be utilized as a prototype for the creation of comparable assessments in other countries where

English is not the primary language. However, it is crucial that the test questions are meticulously tailored to the distinct cultural and linguistic circumstances of the intended audience.

Subsequent investigations should prioritize the enhancement of the inadequately distinguishing elements that were detected in the research and explore the suitability of the TAEP in alternative settings and demographics. Furthermore, it is recommended that researchers investigate potential biases and sources of construct-irrelevant variance in the TAEP assessment, as these factors may have adverse effects on the test's overall validity (Messick, 1989). Future research should take into account the potential influence of test-takers' cultural backgrounds, prior educational experiences, and test-taking strategies on their performance on the TAEP.

The Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) has been found to hold promise as a dependable and sound tool for evaluating the English language proficiency of non-native speakers from Indonesia. This conclusion has been drawn based on empirical evidence. The methodology and findings of the study hold significant implications for professionals involved in language assessment, including test developers, educators, and researchers. Furthermore, this study can provide a basis for future research in this field. The TAEP exhibits a high degree of validity and reliability, and its content is both diverse and pertinent. As such, it holds significant potential as an instrument for evaluating English language proficiency across academic, business, and general contexts. The identification of items that do not effectively differentiate between test takers highlights the importance of ongoing test development and improvement to ensure that assessments precisely measure individuals' abilities and yield significant outcomes.

Furthermore, the TAEP places emphasis on catering to the distinct linguistic requirements and circumstances of non-native speakers of Indonesian, underscoring the significance of customizing language evaluations to accommodate diverse demographics. The aforementioned methodology has the potential to serve as a model for the creation of analogous assessments in additional countries where English is not the primary language, thereby fostering a more comprehensive and culturally attuned approach to evaluating language proficiency.

In order to augment the usefulness and applicability of the TAEP, forthcoming studies ought to investigate alternative assessment formats and delivery methods, including computer-based or adaptive testing. The aforementioned innovations have the potential to enhance the efficacy, accessibility, and equity of the TAEP, thereby rendering it even more pertinent and valuable in the swiftly changing global milieu (Roever & McNamara, 2006).

In addition, longitudinal research investigating the correlation between TAEP scores and practical English language proficiency, such as achievement in academic or occupational contexts, could offer significant perspectives on the prognostic efficacy of the assessment.

This research would aid in determining the degree to which the TAEP functions as a dependable predictor of subsequent language proficiency and achievement (Kane, 2013).

The Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) has demonstrated encouraging outcomes and noteworthy implications for the domain of language assessment, based on its development and evaluation. The TAEP is a highly valuable tool for evaluating the English language proficiency of non-native speakers from Indonesia due to its strong validity, reliability, and relevance. Moreover, its potential applications are not limited to the Indonesian context. Further exploration and advancement in this domain will play a pivotal role in advancing precise, comprehensive, and culturally responsive linguistic evaluations on a global scale.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Indonesia is presently commemorating its 77th year of independence. However, the country continues to struggle with modern forms of neo-colonialism or contemporary colonization, particularly within the realm of education. The persistent dependence on imported goods highlights the necessity of allocating resources towards the development of domestic expertise and assets. The development of the Test of Academic English Proficiency (TAEP) was initiated as a means to attain self-reliance and counteract external regulatory mechanisms within the language evaluation framework of Indonesia.

TAEP has obtained legal certification and registered its intellectual property rights after fulfilling all language test requirements. The Language Center of the University of Muhammadiyah Malang and the Assessment Division of PPM Manajemen, Jakarta, have employed TAEP to evaluate the English proficiency of Bank of Indonesia and Financial Service Authority of Indonesia (OJK) candidates at the national level. TAEP has established global partnerships with Erasmus Mundus programs and has been integrated into their candidate selection procedures.

Our objective is to provide support for the Indonesian President's advocacy for a mental revolution and the rejection of modern colonization by presenting TAEP as a feasible substitute for foreign language evaluations. By means of persistent advancement and assimilation of domestically produced resources such as TAEP, Indonesia can pave the way towards enhanced self-sufficiency and independence across diverse domains, including education.

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