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Analysis of the Correlation Between English Language Proficiency and the Professional Readiness of Students in Teacher Education Study Programs in Entering the Workforce

Mella Narolita1*, Sari Rahayu2

 $^{1}\text{Meeting, Incentive, Convention, Exhibition Study Program, Business Administration Department, Politeknik Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia$

²Islamic Religious Education Study Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah, Institut Studi Islam Fahmina Cirebon, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:

Author Name*: Mella Narolita

Email*: mella.narolita@bisnis.pnj.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the correlation between English language proficiency and the professional readiness of students in teacher education study programs for entering the workforce. Students in teacher education study programs in Indonesia generally focus on mastering subject matter according to their respective fields, while English language skills are often considered supplementary. Current developments in the workforce demand graduates who are capable of adapting globally, including within international educational environments and non-school sectors. The method used in this study was a descriptive quantitative approach through the distribution of questionnaires completed by students in teacher education study programs at several higher education institutions. The research results indicate that among five higher education institutions in West Java, 42% of respondents strongly agree and 35% agree that English is an essential skill that needs to be mastered, while 15% remain neutral because they consider English proficiency not yet urgent when subject mastery is still low. These findings confirm that English language proficiency plays a role in enhancing the professional readiness of students and therefore needs to be more strategically integrated into the higher education curriculum, particularly in teacher education study programs.

Keywords: english language, professional readiness, teacher education students, workforce

INTRODUCTION

The dynamic social, economic, and political changes that have occurred in Indonesia over the past few decades have had a significant impact on the direction of human resource development, particularly in the field of education[1][2]. Amid technological advancement and the openness of the global labor market, the quality of higher education graduates has become a primary concern. One of the key indicators in determining the quality and readiness of graduates to enter the workforce is foreign language proficiency[3], particularly English[4][5][6]. English not only functions as a tool for international communication, but also serves as a gateway to access global knowledge, technology, and information[7]. In this context, teacher education students, as prospective educators and part of the main pillars of national development, face a significant challenge in building professional readiness that is not limited to pedagogical aspects alone[8].

However, the prevailing reality in Indonesia shows that many teacher education students still view English language proficiency as a secondary skill or even irrelevant to the career path they have chosen[7][8]. This is due to the common perception that

teacher education graduates will work in schools, particularly public schools, where the use of English in the teaching and learning process is not a priority because the subjects taught are not delivered in English. The learning focus of students in teacher education study programs tends to be directed toward mastering specific subject matter according to their respective majors or fields of study, such as mathematics education, Indonesian language education, Pancasila education, and others. English language proficiency, in this context, is considered to have no immediate functional value in their professional practice as teachers in primary or secondary schools [9].

Nevertheless, the dynamics occurring within Indonesia's education sector indicate that such assumptions are increasingly becoming less relevant. At present, the education system is facing various structural challenges, one of which is the high number of honorary (non-permanent) teachers in various regions, particularly in public schools, who receive wages far below the standard living wage, even below the regional minimum wage (UMR). This condition affects the overall welfare of teachers, which subsequently impacts their motivation, performance, and the quality of learning in

schools. In such situations, many students in teacher education study programs no longer prioritize careers in public schools and instead consider alternative paths, such as private schools, institutions based on international curricula, or even non-educational sectors. In internationally oriented private schools that adopt curricula such as Cambridge, the International Baccalaureate (IB), or bilingual programs, English language proficiency is a fundamental requirement, not only for everyday communication but also for teaching processes and the delivery of instructional content[10]. In addition, the salary incentives offered are relatively more competitive compared to public schools, making them a rational choice for teacher education graduates who aim to improve their standard of living and develop their professional capacity.

However, not all students who graduate from teacher education study programs possess sufficient English language proficiency, resulting in a gap in meeting increasingly demanding job qualifications, particularly in international educational institutions. This contradiction becomes more evident as many of them choose to pursue careers outside the formal education sector, such as in human resources, training and development, organizational communication, as well the creative and technology industries[11][12]. Ironically, all of these fields require English language proficiency as a basic skill for professional communication, document preparation, presentations, and cross-border negotiations.

Amid the demographic bonus currently experienced by Indonesia, in which the majority of the population is of productive age, competition in the workforce has become increasingly intense[13][14]. In this context, English language proficiency is not solely an additional advantage, but rather an integral part of professional competence that encompasses 21stcentury skills such as cross-cultural communication, technological literacy, critical thinking, and adaptability. However, English language proficiency among students in teacher education study programs still shows significant disparity; some have high levels of access and motivation, while others perceive the skill as irrelevant to their chosen career paths[15]. Therefore, this study offers a new approach by linking English language proficiency and the professional readiness of students in teacher education study programs comprehensively, not only as a linguistic skill, but also as an important indicator in assessing job readiness in an increasingly competitive and global environment.

The objective of this study is to analyze the extent to which English language proficiency contributes to the professional readiness of students in teacher education study programs, as well as how this can serve as a basis for developing strategies to improve the quality of graduates who are adaptive to changing times and labor market demands. At present, the higher education curriculum in several institutions has not yet systematically integrated the development of foreign language skills into teacher education study programs. This reinforces the assumption that English is a

secondary concern, rather than a component of professional readiness that should be developed from an early stage.

To achieve the research objective, this study used a correlational quantitative approach to examine the extent to which English language proficiency contributes to students' readiness in entering an increasingly complex workforce. The main focus of the study encompasses aspects of English language proficiency, including both receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (speaking and writing), as well as dimensions of professional readiness, which include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects.

The results of this study are expected to provide a clearer picture of the urgency of English language proficiency as an integral part of the professional readiness of teacher education students. Furthermore, the findings of this study become strategic input for policymakers in higher education institutions and educational agencies to design curricula that are more contextual, adaptive, and responsive to labor market demands. In the long term, the improvement of English language skills among teacher education students is expected to contribute to the enhancement of national education quality by producing educators who are not only pedagogically competent but also globally competitive.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with a correlational research design. Correlational research is a quantitative approach that aims to determine the correlation or association between two or more variables without manipulating those variables [16]. The selection of this approach was based on the main objective of the study, which was to determine the correlation between the level of English language proficiency and the professional readiness of teacher education students in entering the workforce. The correlation between variables became the focus because this study aimed not only to describe the condition of each variable separately, but also to examine whether there is a significant correlation that is positive, negative, or even unrelated.

The subjects in this study were students in teacher education study programs (excluding English education majors) who were in their 7th and 8th semesters. The selection of these subjects was conducted purposively, as students at this stage of their studies have generally acquired most of the academic competencies outlined in the curriculum, including field practice experiences such as internships or the Field Experience Program (Program Pengalaman Lapangan), and are in the process of preparing to enter the workforce. Therefore, this group was considered the most appropriate for assessing professional readiness and perceptions regarding the importance of English language proficiency in their career trajectories. The sample was drawn from several public and private universities in West Java that offer teacher education study programs, with a minimum of 150 respondents to

ensure sufficient data for correlational statistical analysis.

Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire structured in the form of a closed-ended survey using a five-point Likert scale. There were two types of instruments used in this study. The first instrument measured students' English language proficiency, which included the four main skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. This instrument was designed based on a correlational quantitative research approach. The research design used in this study was correlational research with subjects consisting of students in teacher education study programs, and the primary data source was obtained through the questionnaire. This study identified the extent to which students are accustomed to using English in both academic and non-academic activities, such as reading articles in international journals, completing assignments in English, attending English-language webinars, or engaging in professional communication in English. The second instrument measured students' professional readiness, which was derived from three main aspects: the cognitive aspect (knowledge and understanding of the world of work), the affective aspect (motivation, self-confidence, and attitudes toward the profession), and the psychomotor aspect (practical skills and the ability to adapt in the workplace environment). All items in both instruments were developed based on theoretical reviews and references from previous relevant studies.

Before being used in the main data collection, the instruments were first tested for validity and reliability through a trial involving 30 students from a similar population. The validity test was conducted using item-total correlation analysis, and items with a correlation coefficient above 0.30 were considered valid. Meanwhile, the reliability test was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum acceptable reliability value of 0.70. Instruments that met the criteria for validity and reliability were then used in the main data collection.

The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software. The analysis stages began with descriptive statistics to describe the general condition of respondents related to the two research variables. The mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution were used to map the level of English language proficiency and the professional readiness of students. Subsequently, a normality test was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk tests to ensure that the data met the assumption of normal distribution, which is a requirement for parametric correlation analysis. If the data met the normality criteria, the correlation between the two variables was analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test. This test allowed the researcher to determine the strength and direction of the correlation between English language proficiency and professional readiness.

In this study, the questionnaire indicators were designed to represent two main variables, namely the English language proficiency of teacher education

students and their professional readiness in entering the workforce. In general, these indicators aimed to measure both the actual abilities and the students' perceptions of the role of English in a professional context.

For the English language proficiency variable, the indicators included language skill aspects such as reading, listening, speaking, and writing abilities in both academic and professional contexts. These indicators also covered the use of technical terms relevant to the field of study and students' engagement in activities that use English as a medium of communication. This aimed to capture not only passive abilities but also students' activeness and confidence in using English.

Meanwhile, the indicators for professional readiness reflect how students perceive the world of work more broadly, including their understanding of global demands, readiness to face cultural diversity, and openness to various employment opportunities, both in formal institutions such as public schools and in private or international organizations. These indicators also aim to assess the extent to which students associate English language proficiency with job competencies that provide added value.

As a follow-up step, if a significant correlation was found, a simple linear regression analysis was also conducted. The purpose was to determine the extent to which the English language proficiency variable could statistically explain the professional readiness variable. The coefficient of determination (R²) was used to identify how much English language proficiency contributes quantitatively to the professional readiness of teacher education students.

The entire research process was conducted following research ethics principles, including informed consent from the respondents, protection of personal data confidentiality, and assurance that participation in the study was voluntary and free from coercion. The data collected were solely used for academic purposes and would not be published in any form that could reveal individual identities.

Through this method, the study is expected to provide empirical insights into the importance of English language proficiency in shaping the professional readiness of students in the teacher education study program in response to the increasingly complex and global demands of the workforce. In addition, the findings are expected to serve as a foundation for the development of teacher education curriculum policies that are more responsive to contemporary needs, as well as to promote the enhancement of teacher education graduates' capacity to compete in the labor market, both within and beyond the formal education sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis from 150 respondents who were students in teacher education study programs from various universities in Indonesia, a general overview was obtained, indicating that there is a significant correlation between English language

proficiency and students' professional readiness in entering the workforce. In general, students' English language proficiency levels were categorized as moderate to relatively high, with reading and listening skills receiving the highest average scores, while writing and speaking skills tended to be lower.

The Pearson correlation test showed a value of r=0.586 with a p-value < 0.01, indicating a significant positive correlation between English language proficiency and professional readiness. This suggests that the higher the students' English language proficiency, the higher their level of readiness to enter the workforce. This finding is supported by previous research[17][18]. In addition, the results of the simple linear regression analysis showed that English language proficiency contributed 34.3% to students' professional readiness ($R^2=0.343$).

In the research instrument, students were also asked to respond to the statement that "English should be considered a part of the common skills that teacher education study program graduates must possess." The results are presented in Figure 1.

As shown in the bar chart, 42% of respondents strongly agreed, and 35% agreed that English language proficiency is a common skill that should be possessed by every graduate, regardless of their major or field of study. Meanwhile, only 6% of respondents disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed, indicating that resistance to this idea is relatively minimal.

This finding indicates a paradigm shift among teacher education students regarding the role of English in career development. Previously, teacher education students in Indonesia tended to be oriented toward

careers in public schools or formal domestic educational institutions, with the assumption that the primary skills required were limited to mastery of the subject matter being taught, such as mathematics, physics, or elementary education. However, in reality, the Indonesian education sector is currently facing serious challenges, including issues related to the teaching profession, particularly among honorary teachers, which are marked by imbalances in terms of incentives and workload.

This phenomenon has encouraged many teacher education graduates to seek alternative careers in private schools, international schools, or even outside formal school institutions. This is where English language skills become a determining factor. Many schools with international curricula, such as Cambridge or IB, require instruction to be delivered in English, or at the very least, demand proficiency in academic terminology in a foreign language. Similarly, in non-educational fields such as human resource development, training, edutech startups, and other service industries, communication skills in English serve as a significant added value.

Students themselves have begun to recognize this fact. In the open comment section of the questionnaire, several respondents expressed that they felt left behind when participating in international online training sessions or when applying for jobs in the private sector that required interviews in English. In addition, previous research[19], also found that access to global information and the latest scientific journals becomes limited if English language proficiency is not thoughtfully developed during studies.

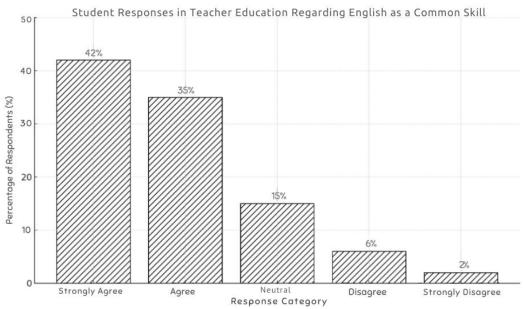


Figure 1. Perceptions of Students in the Teacher Education Study Program Toward English Language Skills

Based on Figure 1, it can be seen that the majority of teacher education students responded positively to the importance of English as a common skill. A total of 42% of respondents stated "Strongly Agree," and 35% stated "Agree." Cumulatively, 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, reflecting a high level of acceptance toward the idea that English language

proficiency is an important component in the general professional context. Meanwhile, 15% of respondents selected a neutral response, indicating that some students had not yet formed a clear stance or were still considering the contextual relevance of English concerning their career paths. Negative responses came from a small group, with 6% of respondents stating

disagreement and only 2% stating strong disagreement. This very small percentage indicates that resistance to English as a common skill is relatively low among teacher education students.

This finding indicates a significant shift in perception compared to the previous assumption that students in teacher education study programs do not regard English as a professional necessity. Currently, more students are becoming aware of the importance of English proficiency, not only in the context of formal learning but also as essential preparation for facing the increasingly competitive and global job market. This also reflects the effect of the higher education environment, which has begun to promote the development of 21st-century skills, including crosscultural communication and the use of foreign languages as an integral part of professional readiness.

These findings also support the need to reposition English courses in teacher education study programs, from merely supplementary courses to core competency development courses across disciplines. English is no longer solely a requirement for students majoring in language education, but has become a crucial common skill for directing an increasingly competitive job market affected by globalization and the demographic bonus.

Interestingly, aside from the majority of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed, as shown in Figure 1, on the importance of English as a common skill, as many as 15% of respondents selected a neutral response. This percentage should not be overlooked, as it indicates ambivalence or a cautious attitude among some students regarding this topic. Based on qualitative analysis of the open comment section in the questionnaire, it was found that this hesitation generally comes from two lines of reasoning.

First, some students consider English language proficiency to be merely supplementary, rather than a core competency in the teaching profession. In the written narratives, mastery of subject matter is regarded as far more crucial than foreign language proficiency. One respondent from the physics education study program wrote, "I have a friend who is very proficient in English, but when explaining the concept of force or energy to students, it becomes confusing because they do not understand the basic concepts." This statement illustrates the perception that there is a potential imbalance between language skills and the depth of subject matter mastery.

Second, several students expressed concerns about the academic misconceptions that are still commonly found among pre-service teacher students, particularly in the fields of science and mathematics. They observed that many students are not yet able to understand the conceptual essence of the subject matter thoroughly. If such material is forced to be taught in English, it is feared that it may further worsen students' understanding at the school level. In this case, they prioritize strengthening their mastery of the core

subject area before developing cross-linguistic communication skills.

Another reason expressed by students who chose a neutral stance is that practical considerations in the field are viewed as more important than making English language proficiency a primary requirement. They argue that job placements are not necessarily in international schools; thus, a solid understanding of concepts and pedagogy is considered more essential than language-related aspects. This perspective aligns with the findings of [20], which stated that although bilingual instruction can enhance multiple intelligences, such practice also has the potential to generate misconceptions in science learning, especially if it is not supported by instructors who thoroughly understand the conceptual content of the material.

However, in reality, the effects of globalization and cross-national professional demands in the workforce have made English language proficiency a continuing primary necessity. Even in national schools, there have been adjustments involving international learning resources, online training, and collaborations with foreign institutions[21]. This means that although English is not the sole determining factor of teacher quality, English language proficiency remains a supporting element that can enrich pedagogical capacity and broaden career opportunities for education graduates.

The neutral stance of some students should not be interpreted as a rejection of the importance of English, but rather as a form of caution to ensure that the development of such skills does not come at the expense of mastery in core subject areas. This highlights the importance of a balanced curriculum integration between disciplinary competencies and global communication skills; thus, students do not have to choose one over the other, but can develop both simultaneously. The findings of this study not only emphasize the importance of enhancing English language proficiency among teacher education students, but also encourage a paradigm shift at the curriculum and study program management levels. English should no longer be positioned as a supplementary subject, but rather as a core component in shaping students' professional readiness.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed a significant correlation between English language proficiency and the readiness of students in teacher education study programs to enter the workforce. The majority of respondents, totaling 77%, expressed a positive perception that English language proficiency is part of professional competence. The remaining respondents held neutral or disagreeing views, considering that subject matter mastery is more essential than mere English proficiency to avoid potential misconceptions in students' understanding in the future. This finding reinforces that English language proficiency has a strategic role in shaping the professional readiness of teacher education students in the global era. The

integration of English language skills into the teacher education curriculum needs to be seriously considered as an effort to produce graduates who are adaptive, competitive, and capable of responding to the increasingly dynamic demands of the workforce.

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