The students' perceptions of the English programs at a pilot academy in Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to explore and investigate the students' perceptions of English Programs held by the Academy and find out about the implementation of the Programs. The students were asked to respond to a questionnaire about how they perceived the programs to help them pass the TEP. The questionnaire was distributed to obtain information about five areas related to achieving program objectives and student improvement in these four skills. The results show that the participants viewed the English programs as effective in improving their English competencies. However, they also led to some deficiencies which seem to be related to the program's implementation. Regarding these deficiencies, the researcher recommends conducting further studies on other aspects of the programs, such as methods and tools in implementing the programs and the instructors' point of view in the academy.

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INTRODUCTION

English is important in various fields, one of which is used as the international language of aviation (Ilyosovna, 2020), which is the official way for pilots and ATCs to communicate (Dewi & Ohi, 2023). Pilots must understand and be able to use English because this is the official and standardized language of aviation communication (Karimi et al., 2019). This has been regulated by ICAO, which sets certain standards for pilots so that they meet the ICAO language proficiency requirement (Dai et al., 2021). All aviation professionals, including pilots, must meet ICAO requirements regarding level 4 of the Language Proficiency Rating Scale (Prekratić & Francetić, 2022; Pershukova et al., 2023). This aims to reduce the number of accidents caused by language communication difficulties (Liu et al., 2022); hence, English Language Proficiency was mandated for all aviation professionals (Estival & Molesworth, 2020). Inadequate English language proficiency has been identified as a significant safety issue (Fowler et al., 2021); therefore, aviation professionals must have high English language proficiency (Herasymenko et al., 2021).

English proficiency then becomes one of the prerequisites for pilot success in completing their flight training (Fowler et al., 2021). TEP (Test of English Proficiency) is the threshold that determines graduation and demonstrates their level of proficiency (Gustanti & Ayu, 2021). TEP is mainly useful for measuring the extent of students' skills in mastering English, especially those from non-English speaking countries (Gultom & Oktaviani, 2022). It will test various aspects of a person's language skills, including listening, speaking, and the grammar structures they use. This, in turn, shows the extent of a person's mastery and understanding of English. Because of the importance of English in the aviation field, TEP results are the requirement of a pilot's graduation. Aviation English has become a measure of the academic abilities of prospective pilots (Rochmawati et al., 2023) and has been chosen by various global aviation schools as the official and standardized language used in learning (Karimi et al., 2019). The programs are held by the academy to determine the extent of success in learning Aviation English among prospective pilots.

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In this case, evaluation is needed for the programs because evaluation is the basic foundation of educational practice itself. Kelly (1999) also describes program evaluation as the attempt to measure the effectiveness of any educational program. This is because educational practices must continue to be improved, developed, and enhanced in order to produce and create quality human resources that are in line with existing demands and needs. Efforts to improve, develop, and improve educational practices cannot be achieved without evaluation (Aldaihani et al., 2015).

In other words, this evaluation was carried out to determine the effectiveness of the English language program organized by the Pilot Academy itself. From this definition, effectiveness refers to the point at which a person, organization, or program can successfully achieve the expected goals. This is in line with what Rahman et al. (2010) stated: effectiveness is related to the ease of use of a thing, especially related to performance or the error rate of use. This then shows the ability or success of the English program in facilitating students' learning of the English language. The effectiveness of this effective learning is related to the achievement of the objectives of the learning itself (Prasetya, 2021). This means measuring the extent to which learning English through the English Program will have an impact on improving the English skills of Pilot Academy students.

Based on this background, this study conducted an evaluation regarding the effectiveness of the English language program implemented at the Pilot Academy. This also included students' perceptions s of the effectiveness of the English program in improving their English abilities and skills. It is hoped that this article can be a basis for consideration by the Pilot Academy in contributing to improving the programs and enhancing its performance.

There are two research questions in this study:
1. How are the English programs relevant to the requirements for the students to pass the TEP in the academy?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the programs?

Evaluation

Evaluation refers to a series of processes carried out to investigate and assess the implementation of interventions, programs, or policies that have been implemented (Kubera, 2017). This is useful for various operational purposes, such as measuring impact or understanding the effectiveness of a mechanism (Honcharenko et al., 2021). Evaluation will produce output that can be used as a basis for anticipating problems that may arise in the future. The output from the evaluation can also be used as a reference when making regulations for a program (Alsyaibany, 2019). Stake (1975) views evaluation as an orientation to the activities of a program where the results of the evaluation are used to provide responses from related parties. Therefore, evaluation can be seen as an activity carried out to measure, identify, and discover the extent to which the program has been successful (Alsyaibany, 2019). This also applies in English learning programs where evaluation of the English language learning program is basically carried out to find out the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved (Susanty et al., 2021).

Evaluation involves a deliberate method and is carried out to obtain information regarding the extent to which predetermined targets have been achieved (Baharudin & Kurahman, 2022). Evaluation will specifically assess certain programs (Manap et al., 2019). The evaluation shows that there is a systematic process carried out to collect and interpret information so that it can be assessed to what extent the implementation of objectives has been successful (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). Evaluation in learning can then be interpreted as a process that is carried out systematically to determine the extent to which learning achievement is based on predetermined learning objectives (Manap et al., 2019). In the context of learning, an evaluation is carried out to determine the extent to which learning objectives or competencies have been achieved by reviewing the entire process, from the initial design to when the learning is implemented. This will show the weaknesses, benefits, and descriptions so that it can provide a basis for planning further learning so that it becomes better (Baharudin & Kurahman, 2022). According to Brinkerhoff (1989), the evaluation of a learning program must be able to show the effectiveness of the designed program and, at the same time, show a significant relationship between the training carried out and the development of the desired skills.

Test of English proficiency

Test of English Proficiency (TEP) is a language test intended to measure a person's ability to understand and use English (Gustanti & Ayu, 2021). It is widely used to determine and assess the extent to which people for whom English is not their first language can use English correctly (Utami & Wahyudin, 2022). The results of this test are used by students who do not use English as their mother tongue to determine college admission and/or college graduation (Gultom & Oktaviani, 2022). Language proficiency tests will examine several aspects of language learning, such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills. This will then show the extent of the effectiveness of teaching and learning outcomes and the desired pedagogical achievements (Gustanti & Ayu, 2021). This series of abilities is then tested in three parts of the language proficiency test: reading, listening, and grammar (Gultom & Oktaviani, 2022). Each of them is a determinant of the level of communication skills in English (Ihlenfeldt & Rios, 2023). Students who get high scores in each category will then be considered fluent in English.

English language proficiency, as a result of setting standards based on the TEP, has been seen to influence students' ability to receive and respond to learning at advanced levels. English proficiency has been found to play an important role in student's academic success based on their requirement to understand courses in science (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020). Other findings show a relationship between English language proficiency and students' academic performance at university (Ghenghesh, 2015). English proficiency has also become a predictor of students' academic achievement in various countries where English is not used as a mother tongue, such as South Africa (Cekiso et al., 2015), Nigeria (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009), Somalia (Addow et al., 2013), Iran (Maleki & Zangani, 2007), and so on.

English proficiency is important in the aviation sector to ensure that no security problems arise due to international communication barriers. Therefore, TEP then becomes one of the prerequisites for pilots' graduation so that they can complete their flight training (Fowler et al., 2021). TEP, in this context, is used to ensure that future pilots do not experience safety risks resulting from language barriers, both during the training period and in their future professional capacity (Lynch & Porcellato, 2020). Analysis of the extent to which the Test of English Proficiency plays a role in reducing aviation risks has been carried out and found that the test, which has been adapted to the communication needs in aviation, has encouraged students to learn aviation English (Choi & Kim, 2020). This shows that students view English language skills as important in their process of becoming professional pilots.

The International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO), as an international aviation institution, has established English as its international language. ICAO also requires that all agencies working in the field of aviation must have good English language skills, even above the average, especially the Air Traffic Controllers (ATC) and pilots. This aims to avoid miscommunication that could potentially occur if one or two parties do not have good English language skills. This communication can be fatal in the field of aviation, which is why English is one of the most important factors in the field of aviation, especially for communication (Barbieri, 2014).

All English speakers must show minimum Language Proficiency at ICAO Level 4 (Operations) in order to obtain a full international license. Personnel need to demonstrate the ability to use language specifically for all aspects of radio-telephone communication. Personnel who demonstrate English proficiency at ICAO Level 6 (Expert) will not be asked to demonstrate English proficiency in the future. Personnel who show ICAO Level 5 (Extended) need to retest every six years. At the same time, ICAO Level 4 (Operational) will conduct retesting every three years. Meanwhile, personnel who show ICAO Level 3 or lower will need Aviation English Language training specifically to achieve the minimum ICAO Operational Level (Skybrary.aero online news, 2017).

To pass the ICAO test level 4, the language skills that are being tested are pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interactions. Pronunciation is a category that assesses the extent to which a candidate can speak in a way that listeners have no difficulty understanding what they are saying, that is, flexibly, clearly, and accurately in the target language. Passing level 4 determines that the pilot candidate can do this well and can even maintain his native accent, but must be able to be understood by the listener most of the time and not cause difficulties for the listener. Structure assesses the ability to use complex grammar consistently so as not to cause misunderstandings for the listener. For passing at level 4, these skills are demonstrated by the creative use of grammatical patterns.

Difficulty in use is permitted to a certain degree if candidates encounter complications or unexpected situations, but beyond that, they must be able to demonstrate that their grammatical skills will not interfere and result in misunderstandings. Vocabulary checks the extent to which candidates can express their ideas using lexical items accurately and precisely, for example, by using synonyms or paraphrasing. At level 4, this is demonstrated by sufficiency in using lexicon items that are commonly used in work contexts and creatively paraphrasing if they encounter difficulties in using vocabulary at an advanced level or in unexpected conditions. Fluency indicates the extent to which a speaker can express his ideas without unnecessary pauses or interruptions.

At level 4, this is demonstrated by the coherent expression of ideas; pauses and interruptions are permitted as long as they do not disrupt the flow and are not distracting, resulting in effective communication. Comprehension assesses the speaker's level of understanding, including the extent to which they understand the ongoing conversation, misunderstandings that occur, and how to overcome communicative problems. At level 4, the ability to understand concrete work and general contexts is demonstrated despite the use of variety or accent. This is also demonstrated by the ability to understand despite linguistic or situational complications and unexpected circumstances. Finally, interaction assesses the extent to which the speaker can manage his relationship with the listener to provide sufficient and accurate information at the right time. This is demonstrated at level 4 by the candidate's ability to provide appropriate, prompt, and informative responses and to be able to sustain the exchange of information and handle misunderstandings adequately by clarifying, informing, or checking (International Civil Aviation Organisation, 2010; Masiulionienė & Tupčiauskaitė, 2023).

METHOD

This research used a case study. A case study is a research approach that involves a case (or many cases) in the real world for a certain period of time (Harwati, 2019). It is used to study a variety of phenomena, including society, community culture, practices, interactions, and so on. Case studies are the right method for resolving questions about "how" and "why" in research (Yin, 2017). In this research, a single case study was used with an explanatory approach. A single case study is used because the research focuses on only one particular case, while an explanatory approach is used to explain certain phenomena that occur (Harwati, 2019), in this case, related to the extent to which students perceive the English language program provided by Pilot Academy. Case studies are considered relevant for examining various topics and contexts related to applied linguistics. This is because case studies can provide a detailed understanding of the phenomenon being examined in accordance with Dornyei's statement, "The rich data obtained about the participants' experience can widen the scope of our understanding and can add data-driven (rather than speculative) depth to the analysis of a phenomenon" (Dörnyei, 2007). Therefore, this research uses a case study to examine the phenomenon of student perceptions of the English Language Program at one of the Pilot Academies in Indonesia.

This research was conducted in November 2023. The participants of the study consisted of 50 students (both males and females) who are joining Pilot Academy. The students were asked to respond to a 17-statement questionnaire designed to obtain information about how they perceive their competencies in English after taking the English programs held by the academy.

The participants might have their confusion because there might be an ambiguity in understanding the questions. Therefore, a careful selection of words and the questionnaire were also written both in English and Indonesian to prevent misinterpretation. Moreover, the researcher remained available and presented the questionnaire during the administration to ensure that the participants obtained the same understanding of the questions. To check the validity of the questionnaire items, the researcher asked for feedback. Feedback prevents the invalidity, bias, and other assumptions and weaknesses of ongoing research (Alwasilah, 2002). Feedback could be asked from individuals or groups that are already familiar with the topic of the research. Therefore, in this research, the researcher asked for feedback questionnaire items from the alumni of the academy. The alumni had experience in the academy and knew the situation about how English works in the work field.

There were two techniques for collecting the data. First, document analysis from the academy, namely EC 120 B. Second, a questionnaire. The participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire

regarding their perception of the English programs. The questionnaire items were developed based on two things. First, they are based on the English skills that will be tested in the TEP. Second, based on the expected findings, which are the students' perceptions of the English Programs whose items adapted from Alrabah (2019) are then specified into several categories, statements one through five are the students' perceptions of their improvement in reading skills. Statements six through nine are the students' perceptions of their improvement in writing skills. Statements ten through thirteen are the students' perceptions of their improvement in speaking and listening skills. The last statements, fourteen through seventeen, are the students' perceptions of the content of the English programs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the findings and discussion related to the research questions. During the analysis of the findings, a scale of (disagree, don't know, agree) was used, and 3 students were excluded as they were not in the classroom. Of the 50 students, the total number of valid responses was 47, the percentage and frequency of which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Students' Perceptions of the Statements about the Reading Skill

Reading Skill	Agree		Don't know		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1) The English programs helped me read and comprehend different types of texts	16	34%	6	13%	25	53%
2) After I finished the English programs, I was able to read and interpret charts and tables	14	30%	3	6%	30	64%
3) The English programs have helped me learn strategies for increasing my vocabulary reservoir	17	36%	7	15%	23	49%
4) The English programs have helped me read and comprehend scientific texts relevant to my field	17	36%	8	17%	22	47%
5) After I had finished the English programs, I was able to elicit ideas in texts by reading between the lines	16	34%	8	17%	23	49%

Table 1 shows that the reading proficiency of the participants did not improve after they had completed the program. As also shown in Table 1, 64% of the participants disagreed that the English programs helped them to read and interpret charts and tables, in contrast with 30% who agreed and 6% who expressed no idea. The same results were shown for the rest of the questions: 53% of the participants disagreed that the English programs helped them to read and comprehend different types of texts, in contrast with 34% who agreed with the statement, and only 13% expressed no idea. It was the same with other statements: 49% of the participants disagreed that the English programs helped them to increase their vocabulary, in contrast with 36% of participants who agreed and 15% who expressed no idea; 49% of participants disagreed that the English programs helped them to elicit ideas in the texts, in contrast with 34% who agreed and 17% who expressed no idea; and last, 47% of participants disagreed that the English programs helped them to read and comprehend scientific texts, in contrast with 36% of participants who agreed and 17% who expressed no idea.

On writing skill, the participants believed that their writing proficiency in English improved after they completed the program. As Table 2 shows, 64% of the participants agreed that the English programs helped them in writing reports relevant to their field, in contrast with 21% of the participants who disagreed and 15% who expressed no idea. The same is true for 51% of participants, who agreed that the programs allowed them to review the writing mechanics and punctuation marks, in contrast with 30% of the participants who disagreed and 19% who expressed no idea.

Table 2
Students' Responses to the Statements about the Writing Skill

Writing Skill	Agree		Don't know		Disagree	
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
6) The English programs helped me acquire the skills of writing texts for various purposes	19	40%	7	15%	21	45%
7) After I finished the English programs, I was able to write well-organized and coherent paragraphs	20	43%	6	13%	21	45%
8) The English programs gave me the opportunity to review the writing mechanics and punctuation marks	24	51%	9	19%	14	30%
9) The English programs helped me write reports relevant to my field	30	64%	7	15%	10	21%

There are two differences between the results of the two other statements, as 45% of participants disagreed that they completed the English programs, they were able to write well-organized and coherent paragraphs, in contrast with 43% of participants who agreed and 13% who expressed no idea. The next statement shows that 45% of participants disagreed that the English programs helped them acquire the skills of writing texts for various purposes, in contrast with 40% of participants who agreed and 15% who expressed no idea. Then, students' responses on their speaking and listening skills can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Students' Responses to the Statements about the Speaking and Listening Skills

Speaking and Listening Skills	Agree		Don't know		Disagree	
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
10) The English programs improved my skills of oral communication in my field of specialization	32	68%	2	4%	13	28%
11) The English programs developed my skills of oral communication in areas outside my field of specialization	29	62%	3	6%	15	32%
12) The English programs improved my skills of presentation	27	57%	5	11%	15	32%
13) The English programs improved my skills of listening in English	33	70%	1	2%	13	28%

The majority of the participants agreed with all the statements in the speaking skills that after they completed the English programs, 70% of participants agreed that the English programs improved their skills of listening in English, in contrast with 28% who disagreed and 2% who expressed no idea. Second statement: 68% of participants agreed that the English programs improved their oral communication skills in their field of specialization, in contrast with 28% who disagreed and 4% who expressed no idea. In the third statement, 62% of participants agreed that the English programs help them to develop their skills of oral communication in areas outside their field of specialization, in contrast with 32% who disagreed and 6% who expressed no idea. The last statement shows that 57% of participants agreed that the English programs improved their presentation skills, in contrast with 32% who disagreed and 11% who expressed no idea. Table 4 shows students' responses to the content of the offered program.

Table 4
Students' Responses to the Statements on the Content of the Program

Content of the program	Agree		Don't know		Disagree	
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
14) The methods used in teaching these programs were effective	28	60%	4	9%	15	32%
15) The English programs did not improve my proficiency in English	5	11%	5	11%	37	79%
16) My English Skills are good and the English programs made no addition	7	15%	6	13%	34	72%
17) The English programs focused on the one skill more than any other skills	12	26%	3	6%	32	68%

The majority of the participants agreed with the statements that the English programs improved their English proficiency, with the percentage of 79% of participants agreeing the programs enhanced their English skills percentage, 72% of participants agreeing the programs didn't focus on one skill with the percentage of 68% agreed, and the methods in teaching the programs were effective with the percentage of 60% of participants agreed.

The relevance of English programs to the requirements for the students to pass the TEP in the academy
The TEP in Pilot Academy focuses on pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interactions. On the other hand, the pilot students also have to master other English skills. The English programs held by the academy also provided other English skills to help them in improving their English proficiency. Therefore, there were also some statements regarding the other English skills taught by the academy.

To answer the first question, participants think that overall, the English programs are very effective as they helped them to improve their English skills. Of the four skills, listening came as the highest skill, as the majority of the participants believed that their proficiency in listening skill was improved significantly. As for speaking skill, the participants believed that the programs helped them to improve their speaking proficiency. For writing skill, the participants' responses were positive on the revision of punctuation marks and writing reports of their own field, though they pointed out some lacks, such as the acquisition of the skill and writing well-organized and coherent paragraphs. With regard to reading skill, the responses from the participants to the statements were not positive, as they indicated that their reading skill had not improved. The effectiveness of the programs in improving the participants' skills was also confirmed by the responses to the statement in the program's section: 60% of the participants agreed that the programs were effective.

The strengths and weaknesses of the programs
On the other hand, the results of the questionnaire showed that there was some lack of programs. First, though the students' perceptions of the writing skills were generally positive, they were not as positive when they responded to the statements that 'the English programs helped me acquire the skills of writing texts for various purposes' and 'after I finished the English programs, I was able to write well-organized and coherent paragraphs' (only 40% and 42% agreed). It might be that the methods were not effective, or there were other problems during the teaching and learning activity. Second, as for reading skill, the majority of the students didn't agree that the English programs helped them improve their reading skill: only 34% said that the English programs helped them read and comprehend different types of texts; only 30% said that after they finished the English programs, they were able to read and interpret charts and tables; only 36% said the English programs have helped me learn strategies of increasing my vocabulary reservoir; also only 36% said the English programs have helped me read and comprehend scientific texts relevant to my field; and only 34% said after they had finished the English programs, they were able to elicit ideas in texts by reading between the lines.

These are difficulties that required additional research on program implementation and instructional experience design. It would be interesting to analyze this topic further in a future study that thoroughly examines the learning process developed for each skill.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the students' perceptions s of the effectiveness of the English programs held by the pilot academy in Indonesia. Forty-seven students were asked to a 17-statement questionnaire to get information about how they perceive and how the programs help them in doing the TEP. Overall, the participants were positive that the English programs were effective in improving their English competencies for the TEP. However, they pointed out deficiencies that appear to be related to program implementation. The limitation of this study is that it is based only on students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the English programs in helping them pass the TEP and how they perceive their own English competencies. The researcher has proposed that additional research be undertaken on other aspects of the programs, such as more specific questions regarding the TEP in the questionnaire, the teaching methods and materials used in their implementation, feedback from instructors, direct observations, and exit examinations after successfully completing the program's requirements. These investigations are certain to complete the overall picture of the program's effectiveness and certainly represent a significant step toward improving its performance.

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