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## Electronic-Based English Qualifying Test (EQT): Students' Perception and Motivation

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### Abstract

In keeping up with the Gen Y and Gen Z students who are now populating our higher education system, the Academy of Language Studies has adopted an electronic-based English Qualifying Test (EQT) to measure students' English proficiency. The success of implementing EQT is vital since it is a nationwide exercise involving all UiTM campuses. The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of their recent experiences after participating in EQT. A total of 1721 UiTM Interim Diploma students enrolled in the May-August 2017 semester participated in the study. The study employed a quantitative method, using a set of online survey to gather information on respondents' perceptions of the overall implementation of the e-assessment, the design and layout of the e-system. The survey was also conducted to obtain information on their motivational influences after taking the e-assessment. The findings indicate that the time allocation of the EQT test was sufficient; whilst, the implementation of the test was well organised. The time allotted in the EQT enables the students to have full control of going through the test items, check their answers and submit them on time. Factors such as technical support in the lab, computer equipment, network capabilities and lecturers' readiness, all contributed to the successful implementation of the EQT assessment.

**Keywords:** English Qualifying Test, E-Assessment, Motivation, Time Management.

### Introduction

Generation Y (born in 1980s – 1994) and Generation Z students are now starting to populate the tertiary education; and, in today's internet era, they practically embrace technology in their daily walk of life. This growing trend clearly suggests a significant shift in the future preference of both teaching and learning. As for testing activities, e-assessment

will soon be one of the most viable options for education testing, despite its relatively new phenomenon (Mikelloydtech, 2012). Snoussi (2019); Burns (2013) claimed that the traditional types of assessment will be inevitably phased out to make way for online assessments. Currently, we are seeing many ODL activities taken place during this pandemic time. The rapid growth of technology in teaching and learning has definitely contributed to the same way of assessing and evaluating learners' performance, i.e. technology.

Keeping up with the cutting-edge technology, the Academy of Language Studies (APB), UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia, has taken an initiative to adopt an online assessment in testing and evaluating students' language listening, cloze and reading comprehension performances. The e-assessment, called an English Qualifying Test (EQT), is optionally offered to all new intake diploma students of UiTM. The structure for the listening comprehension section comprises of three tasks – news items, a talk and a dialogue; whilst, the other test section evaluates students' grammar and reading comprehension skills. Students are tested on language skills via cloze passages and their understanding on several lower-order thinking skills in reading comprehension. With any new intervention, the e-assessment tool adapted by APB is not free from issues. Lack of staff's support and resources, assessment training, time constraint, facilities and readiness are among the challenges that need to be addressed. These challenges were also discussed by other researchers in this area (An et al., 2021; Walker & Handley, 2016; Fuller, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

Internet-based assessments are fast growing and trending in higher education sectors across the globe (Kentnor, 2015). Similar to many other Internet-based e-assessment tools, the implementation of EQT too involves a computer-generated system with an Internet connection. The EQT system is designed to evaluate students' language proficiency in their listening skills, grammar, and reading comprehension, and to stream these students into appropriate level of English courses offered by APB. Because of a huge number of enrollment (approximately 23,000 students per intake throughout Malaysia), there is a need for an efficient system of assessment that is capable of generating immediate results for streaming purposes.

Furthermore, the implementation of the EQT assessment requires a smooth execution of the system involving a nationwide collaboration among 28 UiTM campuses. Such collaboration includes factors such as staff and facility readiness, internet as well as technology support, and conducive testing environment. The challenge, however, is to synchronize the effort as to ensure that the execution of e-assessments runs efficiently.

The EQT assessment is offered optionally to all new intake diploma students; nonetheless, only students who felt that they have already possessed the basic English proficiency skills would confidently sign up to take the e-assessment. Despite the many years of English language exposure in primary in secondary institutions, only a small percentage of students may have the courage to enrol for the e-assessment. The issues of self-confidence, satisfaction and relevancy of taking the EQT assessments for streaming purposes need to be studied for future direction and decision making plans.

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate students' perception on their recent experience after taking the English Qualifying Test offered by APB. Further investigation of the respondents' perception includes the following objectives:

- To examine the implementation and organization of the EQT test
- To investigate students' satisfaction and confidence level after taking the EQT test.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the students' perception on the implementation and organization of the EQT test?
- What are the students' perceived satisfaction and confidence level after taking the EQT test?

### **Literature Review**

The interest in developing and using computer-generated assessment as part of academic evaluations is becoming more intense in recent years (Philipsen, 2019; Chua & Mohd Don, 2013; Chua, 2012). This is mostly due to the fact that technology offers many advantages ranging from ease of administration, effective organization & features, efficient test-taking strategies, as well as increased learning motivation (Philipsen, 2019; Walker & Handley, 2016; Sulistyaningsih, 2016; Hensley, 2015; Maqableh et al., 2015; Chua, 2012).

The business of conducting conventional paper and pencil test involves unnecessary wastage of time human and material resources. With the intervention of e-assessment tools, many test-related administrative matters can effectively be improved and simplified. Hensley (2015), claimed that with e-assessments, time can be saved in scoring and analysing students' test papers. Computer-generated assessments are capable of producing immediate scoring and reporting of students' results as soon as they have completed their assessments. This capability benefits both administrators and educators immensely as they can execute instant and quality decisions about the students. At the same token, consistency in grading can be optimised, ensuring a more consistent internal and external validity (Chua, 2012).

As for educators, e-assessment tools can facilitate in reducing their workload, allowing them to spend more quality time in planning and preparing meaningful learning activities, executing quality lessons, evaluating as well as supervising students' classroom progresses. Immediate scoring with e-assessment facilitation is more accurate and convenient. This feature significantly helps educators to reduce potential errors in calculating and transferring test scores. Furthermore, the data obtained can be analysed and examined to improve issues concerning teaching and learning.

With e-assessment tools, a more standardised and valid test can be designed, produced and conducted. That is, the test contents, its settings, format, test duration and venue can all be consistently controlled and executed simultaneously (Hensley, 2015). Furthermore, the test contents can also be regulated through the use of a large pool of test items, placed in a computer database. These test items, obviously, will undergo a comprehensive setting and vetting procedures to ensure that the test items are of equal difficulty level. With the use of computer randomisation feature, students can be tested using the same standardised test with different test items across the nation (Walker & Handley, 2016).

In computer-generated assessments, students usually apply different techniques and strategies in answering the test items. Time management, sequencing as well as cognitive strategies are commonly deployed by students when taking the test. In a common English test comprising of different types (example: listening and reading comprehension tests), students may deploy different time strategy on different types of test. Similarly, students may also choose different sequence in answering different sections of the questions. According to Walker & Handley (2016), this time management and sequencing strategy, however, may lead to noise or interference that will disrupt other test takers.

As for the cognitive strategies, students usually will review their answers, replace and employ their schemata to help them answer the test items within the stipulated time. For brighter students, the time allocation is perhaps more than enough for them to review their answers. For others, they may spend all the allocated test time to slowly peruse the questions and answer them accordingly.

Studies have reported mixed findings on the use of computer-generated assessments and paper-based examinations (Boevé et al., 2015). Findings showed that some students prefer paper-based examination as compared to computer-generated assessment due to their capabilities to concentrate and work in a printed and structured test papers. In addition, paper-based examination allowed students to preview the overall test papers beforehand. On the other hand, other students who are more accustomed to technology prefer computer-generated assessments because they feel more confident browsing, scanning, sliding, and scrolling using computer features or interfaces. In addition, the students also argued that, taking a computer-generated assessment allowed them to perform faster because they did not have to write down their answers. Moreover, computer-generated assessments with immediate feedback on exam performances help boost students' motivation level as they get excited at knowing their results instantaneously (Mondigo et al., 2017; Boevé et al., 2015; Yau, 2013).

In general, with Gen Y students, learning and taking examinations via computer-facilitated mode has been a more preferred choice. Many perceived that their motivation is heightened due to exciting and interactive experiences they go through in the process of learning. When students have full control of their learning via user-friendly technology, students' interests can be retained over much longer period of time (Noraini Ahmad Basri, 2017).

## Methodology

The study uses a quantitative method to analyze survey data collected. The respondents for this study were UiTM Interim Diploma students, newly enrolled for the May-August 2017 semester. A total of 1721 respondents from 28 UiTM campuses throughout the nation participated in the study.

The data for this study were collected using a set of online survey comprising of 13 survey items. The items sought information regarding the respondents' perceptions on the overall implementation of the e-assessment, the design and layout of the e-system, and their motivation after going taking the e-assessment. For the purpose of this study, only 4 out of 13 survey items were used to analyse respondents' perception on the overall time and organization of the e-assessment as well as their feelings of satisfaction and relevancy of the e-assessment.

The four survey items analyzed are:

- 1) I feel that the time given is sufficient.
- 2) I find the implementation of the test was well organized.
- 3) I will encourage other students to take the EQT tests in the future.
- 4) I think EQT tests allow me to progress into upper level of English language proficiency classes

A Likert-scale is used to categorize students' perception from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Percentage and distribution counts of students' responses are tabulated, analyzed and presented for discussion. In addition, a correlation is run to examine the relationship between survey items on students' motivation.

## Results

Findings for this study examined students' perception on e-assessment time and organization as well as on students' perceived motivation. In gathering the students' responses on the 'e-assessment time and organization', the following two (2) items were asked. Table 1 and Figure 1 show the data and graph on students' responses towards the survey items. For Item 1, 1307 (76%) test takers (n=1721), compared to only 87 (5%) test takers, responded either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that *they felt that the time given was sufficient*. Similarly, for item 2, 1406 (82%) of test takers (n=1718), compared to only 25 (1%) perceived that *the implementation of the test was well organized*.

Table 1

*Students' Perception on e-Assessment Time and Organization*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
I feel that the time given is sufficient.	17 1%	70 4%	327 19%	857 50%	450 26%	1721 100%
I find the implementation of the test was well organized.	5 0%	20 1%	287 17%	908 53%	498 29%	1718 100%

\*3 missing data were found

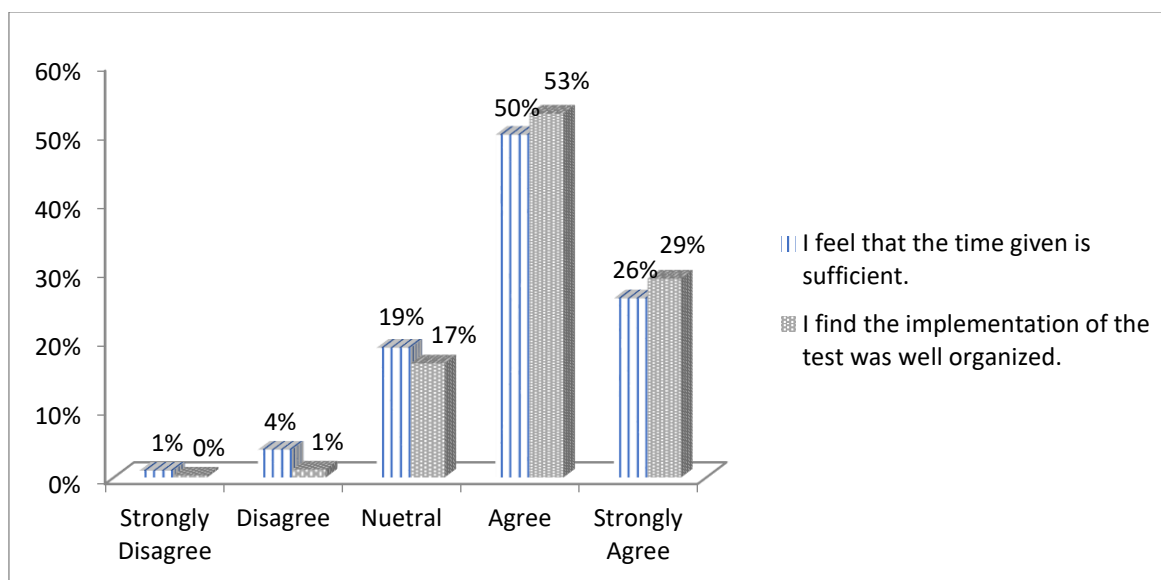


Figure 1: Students' Perception on e-Assessment Time and Organization

After the students had taken the e-assessment, they were asked to respond on two motivation survey items: *whether they would encourage other students to take the EQT tests in the future*; and, *whether the EQT tests allowed them to progress into upper level of English language proficiency classes*. The students' responses on their confidence level and the relevancy of the test are reflected below. Table 2 and Figure 2 show that 1429 (83%) test takers (n=1720), compared to only 15 (1%) test takers, responded either "Agree" or "Strongly

Agree" that *they would encourage other students to take the EQT tests in the future*. Similarly, for the following survey item, 1532 (89%) of test takers (n=1716), compared to only 9 (0.5%) perceived that *the EQT tests allowed them to progress into upper level of English language proficiency classes*.

Table 2  
*Students' Perceived Motivation*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
I will encourage other students to take the EQT tests in the future.	6 0.3%	9 0.5%	276 16.0%	857 49.8%	572 33.3%	1720 100%
I think EQT tests allow me to progress into upper level of English language proficiency classes.	2 0.1%	7 0.4%	175 10.2%	801 46.7%	731 42.6%	1716 100%

\*Note: 6 missing data were found

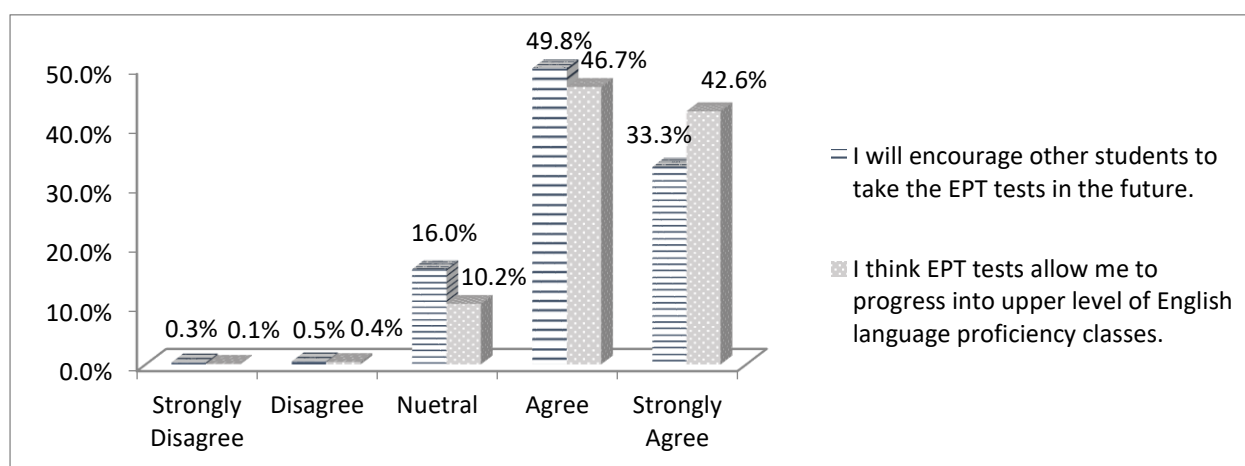


Figure 2: Students' Perceived Motivation

Table 3 shows a correlation between the two items that reported a correlation of .466 (significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)). This means that after taking the tests, the students felt confident that the tests allowed them to progress into upper level of English language proficiency classes. Hence, they would also encourage other students to take the EQT tests in the future.

Table 3

*Correlations between Students' Confidence after taking the EQT and Encouraging other Students to take the EQT*

		I will encourage other students to take the EQT tests in the future.	I think EQT tests allow me to progress into upper level of English language proficiency classes.
I will encourage other students to take the EQT tests in the future.	Pearson Correlation	1	.466**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1720	1715
I think EQT tests allow me to progress into upper level of English language proficiency classes.	Pearson Correlation	.466**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1715	1716

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicate that the English Qualifying Test (EQT) conducted by APB was well organized with full consideration of factors such as time management and test format and layout as well as technology facilities. This is evidence in the survey responses where the majority of the respondents "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" (n=1307, 76%) that the time allocation to complete the EQT test was sufficient; whilst, 1406 respondents (82%) indicated that the implementation of the test was well organized. The allocation of time provided in the EQT (half hour for the listening section; one hour for the grammar and reading comprehension section) enables the test takers to comfortably skim and scan the contents of the test as well as answer the given test questions accordingly before submitting their responses online. Students had full control of going back and forth the test items, reviewing their answers and finally sending their responses when they are ready. The implementation of the EQT assessment was well organized as such the assessment was carefully designed and developed by thorough consideration of its layout, settings, format, test duration and venue. The test contents were also carefully set following the prescribed syllabus and further vetted by the subject matter experts (SME) at APB. Furthermore, the EQT assessment was conducted concurrently throughout Malaysia (28 campuses) for a duration of only two weeks. Without synchronized collaborative efforts that include lab technical support, computer facilities, network capabilities and lecturers' readiness, the implementation of the EQT assessment will not be effectively executed.

The current findings found to be paralleled with findings reported by Walker & Handley (2016) who suggested that e-assessment system should provide an overview feature of test contents where test takers can scan the text before answering the questions. They also mentioned that having a one-page overview of test questions is effective because this would allow test takers to apply their effective test-taking strategies. However, the findings of the study are found to be contradicted to a study by Leeson (2006) where he argued that difficulties of managing time are associated with the fact that multiple items presented on one screen may encourage hurried responses which in return will increase errors.



The findings of the study also show that the respondents are positively motivated towards the English Qualifying Test (EQT). A majority of the respondents (n=1429, 83%) after taking the EQT assessment indicated that they would encourage others to take EQT in the future. At the same token, most of the respondents (n=1532, 89%) felt that the test would allow them to progress into the upper level of English language proficiency classes. These findings show that the test takers, who are Gen Y students, were motivated in encouraging their fellow juniors to take EQT in the future as they felt satisfied and comfortable after taking the electronic-based assessment. Their confidence and satisfaction levels were reflected in their survey responses. Furthermore, the students were excited when they were able to successfully send their tests online and be prompted immediately of their results. This immediate feedback on learning performances, as claimed by Boeve et al (2015) and Long et al (2013) help to boost students' motivation level in answering and performing well in tests. In another study done by Basri (2017), she claimed that students' learning motivation heightened when students were able to receive immediate responses, feedback and reinforcement after conducted their LOTs and HOTs reading exercises. In contrast, Boeve et al (2015) argued that some students still preferred paper-based assessments due to the manageability of working on a printed and structured test papers.

A correlation was also run to see the relationship between "the students' confidence level after taking the EQT assessment" and "their encouragement for other students to take the EQT assessment". A correlation of  $r=.466$  (significant at the 0.01) indicates that after taking the tests, the students felt confident as the tests allowed them to progress into upper level of English language proficiency classes. Hence, they would also encourage other fellow juniors to take the EQT assessment in the future.

In conclusion, the findings of the current study suggest that electronic-based assessment is indeed helpful for students especially those who came from the Gen Y. Factors such as time management and implementation of the EQT test was positively perceived by the students of the current study, in which trigger them to have higher motivation towards the EQT test. It is hoped that the findings of the current study could contribute new insights into the growing body of knowledge as well as it could be a source of opportunities for students of Gen Y to familiarise themselves with the format of the electronic-based assessment.

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