

Reclaiming Justice and Fairness in Standardized English Proficiency Test: The Case of Indonesia

Endah Anisa Rahma^{1,2*}, Firman Parlindungan^{1,2}, Cut Irna Liyana^{1,2}, Iskandar Abdul Samad³

¹Department of English Language and Culture, Universitas Teuku Umar, Indonesia, ²Literacy and Digital Humanities Research Center, Universitas Teuku Umar, Indonesia

*) correspondence: endabanisarahma@utu.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study explores Indonesian EFL learners' perceptions of World Englishes (WE) and standardized English proficiency tests. As English becomes increasingly global, the focus in English Language Teaching (ELT) has shifted from native speaker norms to cross-cultural understanding and recognition of linguistic diversity. Using a case study approach, we surveyed 120 Indonesian learners and conducted a follow-up focus group discussion with six focal participants from different regions. We analyzed the survey data using descriptive quantitative methods and the focus group discussion data using thematic analysis. Results of the survey showed that most participants experienced various challenges in taking mainstream standardized English tests (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS, Duolingo) including limited knowledge on the test content and procedure (55%), expensive cost (53.3%), insufficient time allocation to complete the tasks (51.7%), uncondusive testing environment (30%), and technical difficulties in using technology (22.5%). However, the participants have strong awareness and acceptance of English variation (85.9%), and practical needs for English in academic and cross-cultural contexts (59.2%). A majority (68.3%) hold positive attitudes toward WE, which values effective communication over native-like accuracy, while 72.5% demonstrate readiness for English use in a global context. Qualitative findings revealed that although native-standard benchmarks are still important in some aspects of the test, there is a strong call for tests that reflect global, real-life communication needs, multicultural awareness, and practical language use over strict formality. These findings highlight critical implications for justice and fairness in standardized English proficiency testing, particularly in relation to linguistic inclusivity, cultural relevance, and equal opportunity.

Keywords: World Englishes; English as an International Language; Standard English; Language Testing; English as a Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most powerful tools for international communication, education, and professional mobility in the twenty-first century. As a result, the demand for standardized English proficiency tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and more recently digital-based platforms like the Duolingo English Test, has continued to grow. These assessments are widely recognized by academic institutions, governments, and employers as benchmarks of language ability. In Indonesia, such tests are often used as requirements for university graduation, scholarship applications, job recruitment, and overseas study opportunities (Raharjo, 2020). Their influence on learners' academic and professional trajectories is therefore undeniable.

Despite their global acceptance, standardized tests have long been criticized for issues related to fairness, accessibility, and cultural inclusivity. These tests are predominantly constructed on native speaker norms, which privilege specific varieties of English (particularly British and American standards) while marginalizing other legitimate forms of English that have emerged globally (Norris, 2018). Consequently, learners in outer- and expanding-circle countries such as Indonesia face

additional challenges, as their linguistic repertoires—shaped by local, regional, and global English uses—are often devalued within the rigid frameworks of standardized assessment. This creates tension between the global spread of English as a diverse and plural resource and the monolithic orientation of English **testing** that continues to uphold the so-called “standard” English ideal (Jenkins, 2020).

In parallel, the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has witnessed significant paradigm shifts in recent decades. Scholars of *World Englishes* (WE) and *English as an International Language* (EIL) have argued for a reconceptualization of English as a dynamic, hybrid, and plural phenomenon rather than a homogeneous linguistic system owned by native speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2008; Rose & Galloway, 2018). Within this perspective, the value of English lies in its intelligibility and communicative effectiveness across diverse users, not in conformity to a single native standard. As the number of English users in Asia, Africa, and Latin America surpasses those in traditional inner-circle countries, the need for **rethinking** assessment practices becomes even more urgent (Fang, 2018).

The Indonesian case provides a particularly relevant context for such a discussion. On the one hand, the government and institutions continue to rely on TOEFL, IELTS, and similar tests as gatekeeping mechanisms for academic and professional advancement. On the other hand, Indonesia’s multilingual society and growing participation in international academic and professional networks expose learners to multiple varieties of English. For many learners, English functions primarily as a tool for academic exchange, intercultural communication, and career development, rather than as a means of integrating into native English-speaking communities (Reynandya, Hamid & Nurkamto, 2018). This reality underscores the mismatch between learners’ communicative needs and the expectations embedded in standardized proficiency tests.

Recent studies in Southeast Asia have highlighted several critical issues surrounding English testing. First, access remains limited due to the high costs of test registration, preparation courses, and retakes (Kirkpatrick, 2022). Second, the test design and content often fail to reflect the linguistic realities of non-native contexts, where code-switching, localized expressions, and multiple English varieties coexist (Sah & Fang, 2023). Third, test-takers frequently report anxiety, time pressure, and unfamiliarity with test procedures as major obstacles (Ahmad, 2018; Abbas et al). Collectively, these issues suggest that standardized tests may inadvertently reproduce social inequality, privileging those with financial means and prior exposure to Western testing traditions while disadvantaging students from rural, economically marginalized, or technologically limited backgrounds (Schissel & Uysal, 2025).

At the same time, there is a growing recognition among learners of the legitimacy of English variation and the importance of communicative competence. Indonesian EFL learners, like many in other expanding-circle countries, increasingly acknowledge that successful communication does not necessarily depend on native-like pronunciation or grammar, but on clarity, adaptability, and mutual understanding. This awareness reflects the shift toward a Global Englishes perspective, where English is seen as a shared resource that belongs to all its users (Galloway, 2017). Nevertheless, such awareness has yet to be adequately recognized in the structure and philosophy of high-stakes English tests.

This paper emerges from the tension between these two competing orientations: the native-standard orientation of standardized tests and the plural, inclusive orientation of World Englishes and EIL. Specifically, it seeks to explore Indonesian EFL learners’ perceptions of standardized English tests in light of their awareness and acceptance of English variation. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do learners perceive the fairness, accessibility, and cultural relevance of these standardized English tests?
2. What challenges do Indonesian EFL learners encounter in taking standardized English proficiency tests?

By examining these questions, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about fairness and inclusivity in English language assessment. It highlights the voices of Indonesian learners who are at

the receiving end of high-stakes testing practices, offering insights into how such practices can better align with the linguistic, cultural, and practical realities of English use in global contexts.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to reclaim justice and fairness in English testing by foregrounding learners' lived experiences and perspectives. Whereas much of the assessment literature continues to prioritize psychometric reliability and validity, this study emphasizes equity, cultural relevance, and linguistic inclusivity as equally important dimensions of testing (McNamara & Knoch, 2019). The findings are expected to inform policymakers, educators, and test designers about the need to move beyond narrow conceptions of "standard" English proficiency and toward assessment practices that are responsive to the evolving role of English as an international language.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design to obtain both quantitative and qualitative insights into Indonesian EFL learners' perceptions of standardized English proficiency tests. The mixed-methods approach was chosen because it allows for triangulation between numerical data and participants' subjective experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of fairness and inclusivity issues in language testing (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The integration of quantitative and qualitative results followed a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Clark, 2017), in which both data types were analyzed separately and then merged during interpretation.

A total of 120 Indonesian EFL learners from diverse academic disciplines (English Education, Agribusiness, and Information Technology) participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure variation in gender, discipline, and English proficiency levels. The total respondents is 120, consisting female were 78 (65%) and male were 42 (35%). To provide richer qualitative insights, six participants were further invited for focus group discussions (FGDs) virtually via Zoom meeting. These individuals were chosen based on their prior experience with standardized English proficiency tests such as TOEFL or IELTS and represented both rural and urban educational backgrounds.

Two primary data sources were used in this study: a structured questionnaire and a focus group discussion (FGD) guide.

Questionnaire

The instrument was adapted from existing studies on fairness and Global Englishes in assessment (McNamara & Knoch, 2019; Jenkins, 2022). Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). It contained 25 items organized under five indicators:

- Test familiarity
- Financial accessibility
- Time management and test pressure
- Testing environment and technical challenges
- Awareness of English variation

FGD Guide

The qualitative instrument comprised semi-structured prompts designed to explore participants' opinions on test fairness, cultural relevance, and linguistic diversity in assessment. Discussions were conducted in a mix of English and Bahasa Indonesia to ensure participant comfort and expression accuracy. The qualitative data collected from the focus group discussions (FGDs) were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). This approach involved reading and re-reading the transcribed discussions to gain familiarity with the content, generating initial codes, identifying recurring ideas, and then organizing them into overarching themes. Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows researchers to interpret complex and subjective data in a systematic, transparent, and flexible manner. Through this process, key themes such as *economic barriers*, *cultural bias in testing*, and *awareness of English variation* were identified. These themes provided

deeper insights into the participants' perceptions of fairness and inclusivity in standardized English tests and served to complement the quantitative findings from the questionnaire, thereby enriching the overall interpretation of the study.

The data were collected qualitatively through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) which involved open-ended interview through Zoom meetings with spoken responses from small groups of six participants chosen randomly. These discussions provided rich, descriptive insights about learners' experiences, opinions, and feelings regarding standardized English tests.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over a two-week period in June 2025, from June 16 to 30. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, enabling participants to access and complete the survey remotely. This digital approach ensured convenience and inclusivity across different geographic regions. The participants come from six areas of Indonesia. The focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted via Zoom meetings, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. Sessions were recorded (with participant consent) and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data in this study were analyzed using a descriptive quantitative method to summarize learners' perceptions of standardized English proficiency testing. Data were obtained through a structured questionnaire that employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). This scale enabled respondents to indicate the degree to which they agreed with statements related to test fairness, accessibility, pressure, and awareness of English variation.

Qualitative Data Analysis (Thematic Analysis)

To complement the quantitative results, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). This method involved several steps: (1) familiarizing with the transcribed focus group discussions, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for recurring patterns, (4) reviewing and defining themes, and (5) reporting the findings with supporting quotes.

Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to identify meaningful patterns across the participants' narratives. Key themes that emerged included economic barriers, cultural bias in test content, test anxiety and time pressure, technical challenges in online testing, and awareness of English variation. These themes were supported by participants' comments emphasizing financial inequality, cultural unfamiliarity, and the need for more inclusive, locally relevant assessment models.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate university students' perceptions of standardized English proficiency testing through the lens of Global Englishes. The discussion in this section integrates the quantitative findings from the Likert-scale questionnaire and the qualitative insights from focus group discussions (FGDs) to provide a comprehensive interpretation of learners' experiences and beliefs.

Quantitative Results

The demographic data were analyzed descriptively to provide an overview of the participants' background characteristics. A total of 120 Indonesian EFL learners participated in this study, representing various academic disciplines and levels of English proficiency. Tabel 1 shows demographic data of participants.

Table 1*Demographic Information of Participants*

Aspects	Number	Percentage (%)
1. Work		
Student	17	14.20%
Lecturer / Academic Staff	58	48.30%
Teacher	26	21.70%
Private Sector Employee	5	4.20%
Entrepreneur / Business Owner	4	3.30%
Freelancer	6	5%
International Worker (working with foreign teams/clients)	2	1.70%
Job Seeker	1	0.80%
Contract-Based Employee (Honorary Staff)	1	0.80%
Total	120	
2. Age		
15 – 19	5	4.20%
20 – 24	11	9.20%
25 – 29	10	8.30%
30 – 34	29	24.20%
35 – 39	30	25%
>40	35	29.20%
Total	120	
3. Domicile		
Sumatera	23	19.20%
Jawa	23	19.20%
Bali-NTB-NTT	14	11.70%
Kalimantan	20	16.70%
Sulawesi	24	20%
Papua	16	13.30%
Total	120	
4. Learning English Experience		
<1 year	12	10%
1 - 2 Years	8	6.70%
3 - 5 Years	21	17.50%
6 - 8 Years	12	10%
9 - 11 Years	7	5.80%
>11 years	60	50%
Total	120	

The gender distribution shows that 78 participants (65%) were female and 42 participants (35%) were male. The participants' ages ranged from 15 to 40 years, with the majority (80%) aged between 30 years and >40 years old, which corresponds to typical undergraduate enrolment ages. The quantitative results of this study were obtained through a structured questionnaire that employed a five-point Likert scale, allowing participants to express their level of agreement with statements related to English proficiency testing. The five response options ranged from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5). The data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the percentage of responses in each category to determine general trends and tendencies in participants' perceptions. The overall pattern of responses shows that the majority of participants selected *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* across most questionnaire items, indicating generally positive attitudes toward standardized English testing. The five-point likert scale allowed participants to express their degree of agreement with 25 statements regarding standardized English testing. Responses were categorized as six categories: English learning experience, English language skills, awareness of English varieties, contextual needs, attitudes toward Global Englishes and readiness and exposure.

Table 2

The Summary Of Percentage Responses to Learning English Experience

Learning English Experience		
Questions	Number	Percentage
What is the purpose of taking the English test (TOEFL/IELTS)?		
Continuing Education (S2/S3)	79	65.8
Registering Scholarship	46	38.3
Graduation requirements	49	40.8
Employment Administration/Civil servants selection tests	22	18.3
Personal Interest	29	24.2
Others	15	12.5
What preparations did you make before taking the English test?		
Reading English test preparation books or materials	89	74.2
Practicing with past exam questions	71	59.2
Attending English test preparation courses (such as TOEFL, IELTS, etc.)	60	50.00%
Watching educational videos on YouTube or other platforms	72	60.00%
Practicing listening skills through English audio or movies	60	50.00%
Participating in mock tests or test simulations	63	52.50%
Reviewing grammar and vocabulary	68	56.70%
Studying with friends or in study groups	34	28.30%
Scheduling regular study time before the test	35	29.20%
Consulting with an English teacher or mentor	31	25.80%
Others	6	5.00%
What difficulties did you face during the English test?		
Cost	64	53.30%

Technical difficulties with using technology	27	22.50%
Insufficient time to complete the test	62	51.70%
Unfavorable testing environment	36	30%
What do you need to achieve the highest possible score in the English test?		
A quiet and distraction-free room	83	69.20%
Clear and high-quality audio equipment (for the listening test)	96	80%
Extra time (for participants with special needs)	18	15% ^a
Clear and easy-to-understand test instructions	53	44.20%
Accessibility for participants with disabilities (e.g., wheelchair access, large screens)	9	7.50%
Reliable and well-functioning computer/laptop	62	51.70%
Comfortable and clean personal headset	63	52.50%
Fair and well-scheduled test timing	38	31.70%
Simple and efficient registration and administration process	38	31.70%
Availability of a simulation session before the main test	72	60%
Technical support in case of issues (especially for computer-based tests)	48	40%
Friendly and professional proctors/staff	50	41.70%
Comfortable seating and good lighting	69	57.50%
Availability of drinking water or short breaks	52	43.30%
Others	4	3.33%

The first questionnaire item explored participants' motivations for taking standardized English proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS. The data revealed multiple overlapping purposes, reflecting the multifunctional role of English proficiency certification in academic and professional contexts. As shown in the responses, the most dominant motivation was to continue higher education (S2/S3), reported by 79 participants (65.8%). This finding indicates that postgraduate study requirements remain the main driving factor for English test participation among Indonesian university students. The second most common purpose was for graduation requirements, cited by 49 respondents (40.8%), followed closely by registering for scholarships (46 respondents; 38.3%). These results confirm that standardized English tests are deeply embedded in institutional academic policies, particularly as part of exit requirements or scholarship eligibility criteria, a trend consistent with national higher education practices in Indonesia and Malaysia (Hamid, Hardy & Reyes, 2019).

Other notable reasons include personal interest (29 respondents; 24.2%) and employment administration or civil servant selection (22 respondents; 18.3%), suggesting that beyond academic needs, English testing is also perceived as a strategic tool for professional advancement and personal development. A small proportion (12.5%) selected *Other reasons*, including preparation for international mobility, self-assessment, or general language improvement. These findings align with previous studies showing that English testing in Southeast Asia is increasingly viewed as a "gatekeeping mechanism" for educational and career progression (Shohamy, 2020; McNamara, 2006). The strong link between test participation and academic or occupational goals also supports Creswell and Clark's (2022) observation that educational testing behaviors are often shaped by institutional policies and high-stakes decision-making structures.

Regarding prior experience, 72% of participants reported having taken at least one standardized English test such as TOEFL, IELTS, or Duolingo, while 28% had not yet taken any formal English

proficiency test. This diverse background provided a balanced representation of students with varying degrees of familiarity and motivation toward standardized English testing. Overall, the demographic data indicate that the sample consisted of young, educated, and linguistically aware learners, providing a suitable representation of Indonesian university students engaged in English learning. Their diverse academic fields and prior testing experiences allowed for richer insights into how different learner groups perceive the fairness, accessibility, and cultural relevance of English proficiency assessments.

Besides, the aspects of awareness of English varieties, contextual needs, attitudes toward Global Englishes and readiness and exposure also obtained from participants' perceptions within the framework of Global Englishes. The questionnaire consists of 15 item and presented in the following table.

Table 3

Participants' Perception to the English Proficiency Test in the Global Englishes Framework

No.	Item	Percentage				
		1	2	3	4	5
	English Language Skill					
1.	I am able to understand various English accents (e.g., British, American, Indian, etc.)	21.7	30.8	26.7	15.8	5
2.	I am confident speaking English with speakers from different countries.	10.8	12.5	22.5	30	24.2
	I am able to read and understand texts written by English speakers from different cultural backgrounds.	2.5	13.3	24.2	35	25
3.	I am able to write in English for academic or international professional purposes.	4.2	12.5	31.7	28.3	23.3
	Awareness of English Variety					
4.	I am aware that there are many varieties of English around the world.	0	5	5.8	21.7	67.5
5.	I believe that all varieties of English have equal value and function	0.8	3.3	14.2	29.2	52.5
6.	I am open to learning English from diverse cultural and national backgrounds.	0.8	4.2	8.3	16.7	70
	Contextual Needs					
7.	I use English for international study or work purposes.	0.8	7.5	15	25.8	50.8
8.	I often communicate in English with speakers from non-English-speaking countries.	5.8	23.3	32.5	21.7	16.7
9.	I need an English test that assesses intercultural communication skills.	1.7	5	30.8	33.3	29.2
	Attitudes towards Global Englishes					
10.	I feel comfortable communicating in English with a local accent.	1.7	12.8	27.5	31.7	23.3
11.	I don't mind if someone speaks English with non-standard sentence structures	0.8	8.3	22.5	32.5	35.8
12.	I believe that the main goal of using English is effective communication, not perfect grammar.	0.8	5	12.5	27.5	54.2
	Readiness and Exposure					

13.	I am frequently exposed to English through international media (movies, news, podcasts, etc.).	2.5	4.2	10	31.7	51.7
14.	I have studied or am currently studying with people from different cultural backgrounds.	11.7	10.8	14.2	30	33.3
15.	I feel prepared to take an English test that assesses intercultural and global communication skills	0.8	8.3	20	34.2	36.7

English Language Skill

This construct measured participants' self-perceived ability to understand, speak, read, and write English in global contexts (Items 1–3). The percentage analysis revealed that most participants agreed or strongly agreed with statements related to global communication competence. For instance, 41.5% of respondents agreed and 20.8% strongly agreed that they can understand various English accents (e.g., British, American, Indian). Similarly, 54.2% reported confidence in speaking English with speakers from different countries, and 60% felt able to comprehend written texts from culturally diverse English speakers. However, writing proficiency was rated slightly lower, with only 51.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they can write in English for international or academic purposes. This indicates that while receptive and oral skills are relatively strong, academic writing remains a developmental area. This pattern aligns with findings from Galloway (2017) and Kirkpatrick (2008), who note that EFL learners often struggle to transfer spoken fluency into written academic genres.

Awareness of English Variety

Items 4–6 assessed participants' awareness of English as a pluricentric and global language. The data showed overwhelmingly positive results: 89.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there are many varieties of English worldwide, while 81.7% affirmed that all varieties have equal value and function. Additionally, 86.7% expressed openness to learning English from different national and cultural contexts. These results indicate a high level of awareness of linguistic diversity, supporting the core concept of Global Englishes (Jenkins, 2000; Galloway, & Rose, 2019). Such awareness demonstrates a shift away from traditional “native-speaker” norms toward a more inclusive understanding of English use.

Contextual Needs

This dimension explored participants' use of English for academic, professional, and intercultural purposes (Items 7–9). More than 76% of respondents reported using English for international study or work purposes, while 38.4% regularly communicate in English with speakers from non-English-speaking countries. Furthermore, 62.5% agreed or strongly agreed that an English test should assess intercultural communication skills, reflecting a preference for context-based testing rather than traditional grammar-focused exams. These findings reinforce the argument by Shohamy (2020) and McNamara & Knoch (2019) that language assessment should account for communicative effectiveness and cultural understanding, not just linguistic accuracy.

Attitudes toward Global Englishes

Items 10–12 focused on participants' attitudes toward diverse English forms and communicative norms. The responses revealed strong acceptance of non-standard accents and grammar, with 67.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel comfortable communicating in English with a local accent, and 68.3% expressing no concern if others use non-standard English structures. Most notably, 81.7% agreed that the main goal of English use is effective communication rather than perfect grammar. These results demonstrate a progressive and inclusive mindset among Indonesian EFL learners, consistent with the principles of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Kirkpatrick, 2008; Jenkins, 2000). The emphasis on intelligibility and mutual understanding rather than linguistic perfection suggests readiness for a Global Englishes-informed pedagogy.

Readiness and Exposure

Items 13–15 measured learners' exposure to international English and readiness for global communication assessment. A high proportion (83.4%) indicated frequent exposure to English through media (movies, news, podcasts), while 63.3% had studied with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, 70.9% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel prepared to take an English test that assesses intercultural and global communication skills. This result highlights a strong readiness for global English use and a willingness to engage in intercultural contexts. As Anderson and Banerjee (2001) and Hu (2012) emphasize, such readiness reflects learners' evolving identities as global English users capable of navigating varied communicative situations.

The percentage analysis of the questionnaire revealed that participants generally held positive but critical attitudes toward standardized English testing. Most respondents (over 70%) agreed or strongly agreed that such tests are necessary for educational and professional advancement. However, they also expressed dissatisfaction regarding financial accessibility, test fairness, and cultural representation.

The results showed that 65.8% of participants took the English test primarily to fulfil academic requirements, such as university graduation or postgraduate admissions, while 38.3% aimed to qualify for scholarships. These figures highlight the instrumental nature of English testing in Indonesia's higher education system. English proficiency exams are not simply measures of linguistic ability but serve as "gatekeeping tools" that determine access to academic and professional opportunities (Shohamy, 2020; McNamara, 2006).

The Likert-scale percentage data indicated the highest agreement for statements relating to awareness of English variation (84.2%), showing that participants increasingly recognize the plurality of English and view it as a global resource rather than the possession of native speakers. This awareness is consistent with the Global Englishes paradigm, which emphasizes diversity, equality, and communicative adaptability (Baker, Ishikawa & Jenkins, 2024; Kirkpatrick, 2008).

In contrast, the indicator of financial accessibility had the lowest positive response rate (48.4%), revealing that economic inequality remains a serious issue in access to English testing. These findings parallel those of Schissel & Uysal (2025) and Fang & Widodo (2019), who argue that test fairness should include economic and social equity, not merely psychometric validity.

Additionally, about 66.7% of participants reported that test time limits and anxiety affect their performance. This supports Anderson's & Banerjee's (2001) observation that affective factors, such as stress and test pressure, significantly influence learners' outcomes and should be accounted for in test design and interpretation.

Qualitative Results

A virtual focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with six university participants via Zoom to complement the questionnaire findings and explore deeper perspectives on English proficiency testing. Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), the discussion revealed several consistent viewpoints regarding the relevance, fairness, and communicative value of standardized English assessments.

All six participants agreed that native-speaker benchmarks still play an important role in some aspects of language evaluation, particularly academic writing, pronunciation clarity, and grammatical precision, where formal accuracy is required for university or professional purposes. However, participants emphasized that such standards should not dominate the entire construct of English proficiency. One respondent stated that *"being accurate is necessary, but communication is more than just following grammar rules."*

A strong, recurrent theme across the discussion was the need for tests that reflect global, real-life communication. Participants argued that current standardized tests measure limited linguistic features and often fail to represent authentic intercultural interaction. They advocated for assessments that evaluate practical communication skills, problem-solving, and sociocultural awareness, rather than adherence to rigid native-speaker norms. This perspective aligns with Galloway (2017) and Kirkpatrick

(2008), who emphasize the shift from form-focused to use-oriented language assessment within the *Global Englishes* paradigm.

Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of multicultural awareness in testing, suggesting that tasks should include diverse accents, contexts, and communication scenarios. Such inclusion would, they argued, encourage learners to view English as a global lingua franca rather than a symbol of Western prestige. The discussion thus reveals both respect for formal standards and a clear demand for reform for English tests that balance accuracy with intelligibility, cultural inclusivity, and real-world communicative competence.

The FGD results collectively illustrate that while Indonesian EFL learners recognize the value of standardized English testing, they are critically aware of its economic, cultural, and psychological constraints. Their narratives reveal that current testing systems insufficiently represent their communicative realities and multilingual identities. At the same time, participants' positive orientation toward English diversity suggests readiness to embrace Global Englishes-informed assessment models—ones that prioritize intelligibility, intercultural competence, and inclusivity over conformity to native norms. This aligns with Shohamy's (2020) advocacy for *critical language testing*, which calls for democratizing assessment and embedding ethical awareness in testing design. Thus, the FGD results deepen the quantitative findings by highlighting the human dimension behind statistical patterns—emphasizing fairness, accessibility, and representation as essential principles of 21st-century English assessment. These qualitative insights support the quantitative evidence that Indonesian EFL learners are ready to move beyond native-standard dependency and embrace a more equitable, globally relevant model of English assessment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results above, it can be drawn some points as follow:

Results from learners' perception revealed that most participants acknowledged the importance of English proficiency tests for academic and professional advancement. However, they also expressed concerns regarding test affordability, fairness, and the limited representation of real-life communication skills. Quantitative analysis indicated high awareness of English varieties, positive attitudes toward linguistic diversity and readiness to engage in global communication context, yet persistent dependence on native-speaker standards remained evident in formal evaluation contexts. However, the same learners reported significant challenges such as high costs, time pressure, and limited test accessibility—factors that disproportionately affect students from economically or technologically constrained backgrounds.

The qualitative findings from the Zoom-based FGD with six participants highlighted that, while native-standard benchmarks remain relevant in academic writing and pronunciation, there is a strong call for tests that mirror authentic, global communication. Participants emphasized multicultural awareness and practical language use over strict formality, advocating for assessments that reflect genuine intercultural interaction rather than rigid grammatical conformity.

This study advocates for the design of Global Englishes-informed assessments that recognize the legitimacy of multiple English varieties and align with learners' real-world communicative needs. Future research should explore policy-level interventions and alternative assessment models that promote linguistic diversity and fairness, particularly in expanding-circle contexts like Indonesia. By situating English testing within the realities of global communication, educators and policymakers can move closer to achieving a more just, accessible, and globally representative system of language assessment.

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