

ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE MUET TEST 2022: IDENTIFYING PATTERNS AND AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT. This paper presents an analysis of student's performance in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) conducted in the year 2022. The study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing descriptive analysis techniques to scrutinize the data obtained from 96 participants. The method used was percentile analysis, where each piece of data was broken down into percentages. The primary objective of the analysis is to identify patterns and areas of improvement within the components of the MUET test: reading, listening, writing and speaking. The findings of the study reveal a notable trend among the students indicating a lack of proficiency in the reading and listening components. The subpar performance in these areas subsequently had an adverse effect on their overall achievement in the writing and speaking components of the test. This observation suggests a need for targeted interventions and enhanced instructional strategies to address the identified weaknesses. By examining the patterns of achievement across the different components of the MUET test, this research paper provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers and curriculum developers. It highlights the importance of focusing on the reinforcement of reading and listening skills to enhance students' overall performance in English language proficiency assessments and their English language proficiency in general.

KEYWORDS: MUET test, English proficiency assessment, student performance

1 INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian University English Test or MUET is an English proficiency test conducted in Malaysia and primarily used for admission purposes into Malaysian public universities. Administered by the Malaysian Examinations Council (MEC), the test is conducted 3 times a year at designated test centres across Malaysia. It is primarily taken by students who intend to pursue higher education in Malaysian public universities. To further their studies and apply for entry into public universities, a significant number of students from Politeknik Mersing (PMJ) register as test-takers for MUET every year.

Previously, a few studies have been conducted to analyse students' performance on the test. Among all, (Moon & Siew, 2004; Abd Samad, A., Syed Abd Rahman & Yahya, 2008; Zulkifli, M. N., Nur Azilah, I., Nuraini, K., Shahrum, A. & Mohd Marzuki, M., 2011) have looked at the predictive validity of the MUET in terms of test results and subsequent academic success. Scores were previously divided differently for each component prior to the introduction of the CEFR-aligned MUET. Language skills of speaking (45), listening (45), reading (135), and writing (75) were the highest possible scores for each component. The accumulated scores came to a total of 300. However, since the recent revision of the MUET structure in 2021 to align with the CEFR standard, PMJ students' achievement has not been examined thoroughly. Therefore, this study was carried out to analyse PMJ students' achievement on all 4 components tested in the newly introduced CEFR-aligned MUET.

1.1 Objective

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- i) To identify students' level of proficiency based on the MUET band.
- ii) To recognize patterns and areas of improvement within the components of the MUET test based on students' scores.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 MUET

The purpose of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) is to evaluate candidates' English language proficiency to assist institutions in making better decisions about the readiness of potential students for academic coursework as well as their capacity to use and comprehend English in a variety of contexts in the higher education environment. This test was originally offered in 1999 and tested 4 (four) components namely; listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The maximum score for each component is divided fairly with 90 each. The score is then accumulated to the aggregated score of 360. The aggregated score is then categorized by bands from Band 1 to Band 6. Since 1999, MUET has undergone a few revisions and the most recent was in 2021 as MUET was revised to align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Common European Framework of References (CEFR) is introduced in the roadmap as an approach to have graduates with language competency at par with the global standard. The CEFR-aligned standards will make it clear, what skills students must acquire to enhance their English proficiency and to get the most out of their academic training at the tertiary level. In addition, the alignment is crucial for it to match with The Roadmap for 2015-2025 designed by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

2.2 MUET alignment with CEFR

Aligning the MUET with the CEFR brings several benefits and serves various purposes. The alignment allows for international comparability and ensures that MUET scores can be easily understood and evaluated by institutions and organizations worldwide. By being comparable, MUET's validity and reliability are enhanced tremendously as MUET effectively measures the relevant language skills and accurately reflects the proficiency levels of test takers. The alignment also made MUET recognized internationally and increase its mobility in countries where CEFR-aligned frameworks and standards are commonly used. Finally, aligning MUET with the CEFR standards provides a framework for curriculum development and instructional planning. It helps educators and curriculum developers align their teaching objectives and learning outcomes with the desired language proficiency levels outlined in the CEFR.

This alignment ensures that language education programs and materials are designed to meet internationally recognized standards and effectively prepare students for the demands of academic and professional contexts. Overall, this alignment brings numerous advantages, both for individuals taking the test and for institutions and organizations that rely on MUET scores for decision-making purposes.

2.3 Receptive and Productive Skills in language learning.

MUET measures various aspects of language skills, including receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). According to Mohammed Iqram Hossain (2015), receptive skills such as reading and listening are called receptive because they involve receiving the language and understanding its meaning. On the other hand, productive skills such as speaking and writing involve producing language to convey meaning. The performance in MUET can indeed be related to the development of these skills in learning the English language.

Krashen (1982) believes that it is a natural linguistic sequence and that productive skills evolve from receptive skills. Generally, good listening skills enable students to comprehend and understand spoken English accurately, follow instructions, and extract relevant information. Meanwhile, strong reading skills allow students to comprehend and analyse written English texts effectively, identify main ideas, infer meaning from context, and answer questions accurately. Next, strong speaking skills involve clarity of pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and the ability to express ideas and opinions effectively. Also, proficient writers can produce well-organized essays, employ appropriate grammar and vocabulary, convey ideas logically, and support arguments with evidence.

Therefore, language learners need to engage in activities that enhance their listening, reading, speaking and writing abilities. A balance between these skills is necessary to achieve desired proficiency in English language learning and subsequently to excel in the MUET test. This can be achieved through regular practice, exposure to authentic English materials, interaction with good English speakers and seeking feedback from trainers or language experts. Hence, a comprehensive

approach to language learning that focuses on improving both receptive and productive skills will positively impact students' performance in the MUET examination.

3 METHODOLOGY, SCOPE AND LIMITATION

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to analyse the performance of students in the MUET conducted in 2022. The aim was to identify patterns and areas of improvement within the four components of the test: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The study included a total of 96 Politeknik Mersing (PMJ) students who had taken the MUET test (Session 1) in 2022. These students are from different programmes in PMJ with different proficiency levels. Nevertheless, they had undergone at least one English course in the polytechnic curriculum and had gone through a few sessions of MUET preparatory class before taking the MUET test. Therefore, they are well exposed to receptive skills to be translated into good production skills.

The necessary data for this research was obtained from the official MUET test scores. The scores for each component were recorded and organized for analysis. Descriptive analysis like frequency distribution and Mean score was conducted to scrutinize the patterns of students' achievement. These techniques allowed for a comprehensive examination of the student's performance across the different components. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this study. First, the research relied solely on the MUET test scores as the primary source of data. Other factors that may influence students' performance such as internal and external factors were not considered. Second, the study was limited to a specific group and time limit, focusing on the MUET test takers in 2022. Hence, the findings and recommendations of this study should not be generalised to other circumstances.

4 FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The MUET-CEFR alignment in 2021 still used a similar format as the former format except for the score. The scoring format changed from six bands to nine. The aggregated score is divided into three categories namely; proficient, independent, and basic. Table 1 outlines the aggregated scores, bands, and proficiency.

Table 1: MUET Scoring System

AGGREGATED SCORE	BAND	USER
331-360	5+	Proficient
294-330	5.0	
258-293	4.5	Independent
211-257	4.0	
164-210	3.5	
123-163	3.0	
82-122	2.5	Basic
36-81	2.0	
1-35	1.0	

4.1 Students' Performance in MUET Test.

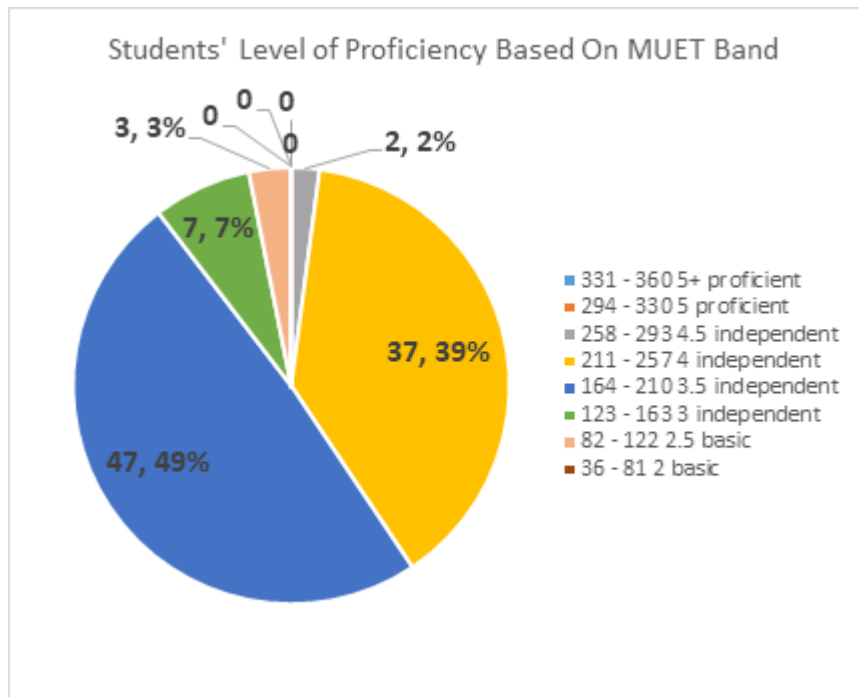


Figure 1: Percentages of students according to the level of proficiency based on MUET Band

The figure shows the percentages of students according to the level of proficiency based on MUET aggregated score. Depicted from the analysis, there were two categories of users among respondents namely; basic and independent users. A person with a foundational level of language proficiency is referred to as a basic user. Beginners or learners who are still in the beginning stages of language acquisition are frequently categorised as being at this level. Meanwhile, an individual who has attained a higher level of language proficiency and can act independently in a variety of circumstances is referred to as an independent user. The highest number of users was independent users with Band 3.5 (37 users). 2 students fell under the basic users' category, and the lowest number of users was independent users with Band 4.5 (2 users). Students who achieved Band 4.5 grasped the receptive skills; listening and reading which contributed to higher aggregated scores compared to students who achieved Band 2.5.

Reading and listening skills are strong among students in Band 4.5, which improves performance in the writing and speaking parts. Students' ability to comprehend lengthy speeches and follow complex lines of reasoning was one of the descriptors in the listening component used to determine Band 4.5 MUET scores. These students had a good understanding of the understanding component, which included the descriptor for reading. They met the criteria outlined in the description, which allowed them to perform well in terms of productive skills. It was supported by Abd Samad, et al. (2008) who reported that reading component was the most highly related skill to contribute to productive skills. Input-Output Relationship which suggested by Krashen (1982) also stated that comprehensible input is how language learners pick up unfamiliar words. This suggests that language production skills are built on a foundation of exposure to and comprehension of linguistic input through reading and listening. Learning the language well through receptive skills allows students to use that understanding to communicate more clearly in speaking and writing.

4.2 Students' Performance Across Component

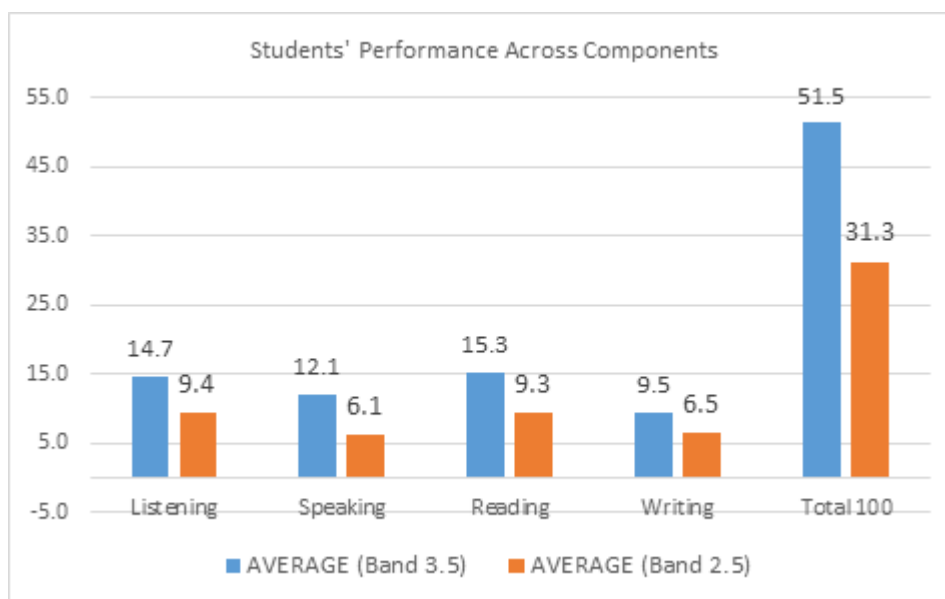


Figure 2: Students' Performance Across Components

Figure 2 illustrates the performance trends and patterns among the students, particularly for students in Band 3.5 (the largest group) and students in Band 2.5 (the smallest group). The main objective was to recognize consistent performance trends within the various sections of the MUET test and to identify areas that require improvement. Compared to Band 2.5 students, who received scores of 9.4 and 9.3, students in Band 3.5 achieved higher average listening and reading scores of 14.7 and 15.3. In addition, students in Band 3.5, also achieved higher averages in speaking and writing with 12.1 and 9.5. This shows that both groups have a similar pattern.

The analysis pointed out that students with good listening and reading skills can score better in speaking and writing skills. According to Brown (2015), receptive skills are those used in understanding, and they are gained through reading or listening. Meanwhile, language production is a necessary component of productive skills that can be acquired through speaking or writing. Lee and Muncie (2006) stated that when learning a new language, it is best to be more receptive than productive. For Lee and Muncie (2006), some level of receptive knowledge is essential logically for production to occur. It is also supported by Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) which stated that the main factor to determine the acquisition of proficiency in the L2 is exposure to vast amounts of input material.

Krashen (1982) suggested that learners' receptive competence should be developed more than their productive competence during language instruction. According to him, receptive knowledge will naturally lead to learners' productive abilities. Meaningful comprehension is very important before focusing on production. This condition is required to facilitate language learning (Krashen, 1982). In a nutshell, having good receptive skills will contribute to better productive skills; speaking, and writing.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that Reading and Listening Skills should be strengthened. Language teachers or trainers should design and implement interventions that focus on improving students' reading and listening abilities. This could include incorporating extensive reading programs, providing authentic listening materials, and engaging students in activities that enhance comprehension and critical thinking in these areas. Future research directions may explore the underlying factors contributing to the identified weaknesses, investigate effective teaching methodologies to address the specific challenges faced by students and evaluate the impact of targeted interventions on improving performance in the MUET test. Such endeavours can contribute to the formulation of evidence-based strategies to enhance English language education and facilitate better outcomes in language proficiency assessments among students.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the students' performance in MUET taken in the year 2022. The emphasis has been on their level of competence as measured by bands and performance for each MUET component. The analysis of students' performance has shed light on important patterns and areas of improvement within the test's components. The findings indicate a significant lack of proficiency in the reading and listening components, which subsequently hurt students' performance in the writing and speaking components. Good productive skills require strong receptive skills. This suggests a need for targeted interventions and enhanced instructional strategies to address these weaknesses and improve overall English language proficiency. It is hoped that the paper will help educators understand how to improve students' reading and listening abilities to boost their overall performance.

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