

# Investigating and Assessing Competence of High School Teachers of English in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher competence is a description of skills, knowledge, and behaviours required by teachers to perform effective teaching. Although there are variations of required competence from one scholar to another, the question remains the same – whether teachers have competence. This paper reports on the competence required by high school teachers of English in Indonesia (HSTEI), and describes the development of performance tasks to assess it. The required competence was firstly identified from theories of teacher competence (Cross, 2003; Mulhauser, 1958; Richards, 1998), resulting in three domains; language competence, content knowledge about language, and teaching skills. These domains consisted of several dimensions. The dimensions were defined operationally, then validated by correlating them to five course syllabuses of English teacher training, and reviewed by asking teachers, supervisors, teacher trainers, and faculty members to view the dimensions in the context of English teaching at high schools in Indonesia. The investigation revealed 12 dimensions of competence HSTEI should have. Two rubrics were developed to assess the 12 dimensions through their lesson plans and teaching performance. The research concludes that 1) competent HSTEI have content knowledge and teach that knowledge in a pedagogically engaging learning context using *good* English, and 2) the performance tasks developed can assess the identified competence.

**KEYWORDS:** Teacher competence, assessment, high school, ELT

## Introduction

Teacher competence affects the quality of teaching and determines the success of students' learning. Jalal et al. (2009, p. 7) state that, "good quality of teachers can produce good quality of students, and then the poor quality of teachers can contribute to the poor achievement of students". Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 94) define competence as "a description of the essential skills, knowledge and behaviours required for the effective performance of a real world task of activity". The definition covers three key words: skills, knowledge, and behaviours that determine the effectiveness of performing an action. Relating to teachers, Bailey (2006, p. 210) describes competence as "statements about what teachers are supposed to know and be able to do".

Although researchers accept the definition, especially the key words: skills, knowledge, and behaviours, as the concepts that underline competence, they view the concepts differently. The skills, knowledge, and behaviours that constitute effective teaching are different from one scholar to another scholar and from one context to another context. Mulhauser (1958), for example, categorizes the competence of a foreign language teacher into three headings: (1) language competence-oral, aural, reading, and writing; (2) cultural background in the broad sense, including civilization, linguistics, and literature; and (3) techniques and skills specific to the teaching of foreign language. Richards (1998), on the other hand, proposes six domains: 1) theories of teaching, 2) teaching skills, 3) communication skills, 4) subject matter knowledge, 5) pedagogical reasoning and decision-making, and 6) contextual knowledge. Cross (2003) identifies four distinct areas of a competent English teacher, which are 1) level of education 2) subject competences 3) professional competences, and 4) attitudes. The three perspectives show an agreement on the following domains: content knowledge, teaching skills specific to English teaching, and English communicative competence, the ability to communicate grammatically correct English, and to use the language appropriate to situational contexts.

The three domains of competence are generic in nature. This means that these domains are not specifically formulated for competence required by high school teachers of English in Indonesia. For example, Mulhauser (1958) states that a foreign language teacher should have knowledge about language. This covers the knowledge of how language works, and how language is related to cultural background. Richards (1998) and Cross (2003) also support the idea that teachers should know their subject matter. Since the subject is English, they have to know about English. In relation to language knowledge in English teaching at high schools in Indonesia, the present study identifies that this knowledge should cover what is stated in the curriculum. The high school curriculum emphasizes the mastery of English grammar and understanding of language functions in spoken language and rhetoric in written language so that the students can communicate in acceptable English (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2003). This implies that to achieve communicative competence, students should have knowledge about English grammar and knowledge of language functions and rhetoric. Consequently, those who teach English at high schools in Indonesia should also possess this knowledge. The present study intends to investigate the three domains of competence in relation to

the teaching of English at high schools in Indonesia.

Research in teacher competence usually attempts to find out what teachers should know and are able to do, which then leads to teacher assessment (TA). Research on TA is mostly conducted in two steps (Fantini, 1993; Gerlach & Milward, 1989). The first is to set the standards of competence that a teacher should have for effective teaching. McCloskey, Thornton, and Touba (2007, p. 7) state that, “a foundation of teacher assessment is the establishment of standards that define what a qualified teacher must know and be able to do”. The second step is to develop the assessment instrument. Lynch (2003) defines an assessment as a procedure to investigate an individual’s ability to perform a specific task. In other words, it is a procedure to find out someone’s capability to do something. Teacher assessment, then, can be viewed as the procedure to investigate a teacher’s ability to teach. The procedures are various, “test, structured observation, performance tasks, or simulations” (Lynch, 2003, pp. 119-123).

Effective teaching relates to competence that a teacher has. The question that arises is how to ascertain that teachers have competence as having paper qualifications does not always mean that teachers have the necessary competence.. Abdul-Hammied (2003, p. 14) states that “*Seringkali gelar yang diperoleh tidak memiliki korelasi positif dengan kompetensi bahasa dan mengajar yang sesungguhnya*” (having a degree in English teaching does not always correlate positively with language and teaching competence).

Investigating teacher competence should consider the context where English is used. In Indonesia, English is a foreign language (EFL), where English has no official status but is the priority in foreign language teaching (Crystal, 2003). The EFL status brings pedagogical implications for both students and teachers. Students have limited opportunities to use English outside classroom. They do not see any practical use of having English language competence, making them unmotivated to learn English. This condition challenges English teachers to have competence that can engage the students in their learning and motivate them to learn. Investigating teacher competence and developing teacher assessment should take this condition into considerations. Chandler and de Ortiz (2004, p. 2) explain that, “the assessment formats and instruments used should be varied according to the circumstances of the educational setting”. Those conditions imply that there is a need to develop instrument to assess English teacher competence based on competence investigated under a specific context.

The present study investigates and assesses competence of high school teachers of English in Indonesia. This research specifically asks the following questions: 1) what competence is required for high school teachers of English in Indonesia?, and 2) how is the performance task to assess competence of high school teachers of English developed?

## Research Methodology

To answer the first research question, the researcher investigated theories related to English teacher competence proposed by Mulhauser (1958), Richards (1998), and Cross (2003). The choice of the theories was based on the fact that these theories indicated constant domains of what an English teacher should know and be able to do from year to year. The three theories showed similarities in three domains: language competence, content knowledge, and teaching skills related to language teaching. Each domain consisted of several dimensions. The investigation of each dimension resulted in a broad concept that needed an organization. The dimensions were organized so that similar dimensions were selected, categorized, and displayed in a matrix of competence dimensions. The dimensions were then defined operationally by referring to the theories investigated.

The operationally defined dimensions were then checked for validity by correlating them with the course syllabuses provided by five English departments that conduct pre-service teacher trainings for high school teachers of English in Indonesia. The choice of these English departments was based on the types of institution that conduct teacher training in Indonesia, and on the accessibility to those syllabuses on the Internet. To correlate the dimensions with the course syllabuses, the researcher checked (V) each operationally defined dimension of competence when it was covered in the syllabus. For example, in one course syllabus, a subject, *Teaching English as a Foreign Language-1*, was taught. Based on the course description and objective of the subject, the dimension of *teaching techniques* and *management of learning* in the matrix was checked.

A field review was conducted in the form of a survey to elicit what respondents said about what high school teachers of English in Indonesia should know and be able to do. High school teachers of English and principals, faculty members, teacher trainers, supervisors and scholars with ELT background who participated in this research were given a question, “*What should high school teachers of English in Indonesia should know and be able to do?*” The respondents were those that the researcher selected randomly at conferences, seminars, workshops, trainings or online-chats. 98 responses were obtained. This survey resulted in a list of knowledge, skills, and behaviours required for high school teachers of English in Indonesia. Responses from the survey were listed, categorized, and then compared with the matrix of competence dimensions. Each dimension of competence in the matrix was given a checkmark if it was mentioned in the responses. The investigation generated 12 competence dimensions that high school teachers of English in Indonesia should have.

To answer the second research question, the researcher developed performance tasks to assess the 12 competence dimensions. The first issue to handle is defining the construct. According to Galaczi and Miller (2010, p. 42) “Construct is latent knowledge or ability the procedure aims to assess”. The construct of the performance tasks related to the competence of high school teachers of English in Indonesia. After competence dimensions were investigated, performance indicators for each dimension were formulated. Tasks that demanded the teachers to exhibit indicators were constructed. The

construct of the tasks was to assess what a candidate can actually do in their job. Therefore, the researcher developed rubrics to assess English teachers' performance to design a lesson plan and to teach an English lesson. Lesson planning and teaching performance were considered to be tasks that every teacher should know and be able to carry out. The rubric was used to mark the performance on each indicator. To develop the rubric, the present research referred to the model developed by Steven and Levi (2005, p. 5) who described a rubric as consisting of "a task description (the assignment), a scale of some sort (levels of achievement, possibly in the form of grades), the dimensions of the assignment (a breakdown of the skills/knowledge involved in the assignment), and descriptions of what constitutes each level of performance (specific feedback)". All these components were mapped onto a grid.

Marking and grading criteria were designed so that they could discriminate between high and low teacher's competence. The total score for each task was determined by the number of dimensions that were covered in each task. Lesson plan contributed 30% to the final score, while teaching performance contributed 70%. This decision was based on the fact that there were three out of twelve dimensions were covered in lesson planning, while nine dimensions were covered in the teaching performance. The overall score was graded using levels of performance, categorizing a candidate as ineffective, novice, competent, and excellent.

The tasks were validated via a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with three experts in testing and assessment. The consultants were three faculty members whose main jobs were related to testing and assessment. They were selected because the researcher thought they have had experience both in teaching and developing tests or assessments. In this FGD, they examined the tasks by using a list of questions as a guide. Their responses were used as data to validate and to revise the task.

To control the quality of the performance tasks, a trial phase was conducted. Two examiners were selected to evaluate the teachers' performance during the trial phase. The examiners were selected based on their length of service as supervisors. They had been supervising teachers for more than ten years. Each examiner evaluated the teachers' performance using the same rubric. There were six high school teachers of English who participated in this phase. The scores were analysed quantitatively to measure inter-rater reliability by calculating the mean of their ratings. The development of the assessment resulted in two performance tasks to assess the target competence dimensions.

## **Findings**

The research findings cover two main issues, namely (1) findings in investigating competence that generate L2 competence dimensions of high school teachers of English in Indonesia, and (2) findings related to the development of performance tasks to assess competence.

### ***Competence dimensions***

From the process described in the research methodology, the present research generated

the domains and dimension of competence required for high school teachers of English in Indonesia, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Matrix of competence required for high school teachers of English in Indonesia

Domains/Dimensions	Operational Definitions
Domain: English Language Competence	
Oral/Written Communication	Can understand the main ideas of a discourse, interact with students fluently, and produce clear discourse in presenting and explaining lesson content.
Linguistic	Can use vocabulary correctly and appropriately, maintain grammatical accuracy, pronounce words or sentences correctly and naturally, and write accurately.
Sociocultural	Can express ideas politely in formal or informal expressions appropriate to the situation and participants involved.
Domain: Content Knowledge	
Text Types	Can information in a spoken and written text based on the conventions in a particular context.
Grammar Points	Can show mastery of grammar points being taught.
Domain: Teaching skills	
Sub-domain: Lesson Planning	
Objectives	Can formulate statements of intended learning outcomes.
Material Development	Can produce learning and teaching materials that integrate learning objectives, engaging learning tasks, and assessment related to materials.
Sub-Domain: Teaching Performance	
Management of Learning	Can organize pair, group, and class work, give classroom commands, time a lesson, and maintain attention.
Teaching Techniques	Can apply teaching techniques that promote students engagement.
Learning Styles	Can stimulate the students to use multiple modes of information processing.
Learning Strategies	Can demonstrate to the students how to learn.
Qualities of Engaging teacher	Can perform verbal and non-verbal expressions to encourage the students to participate.

After all the dimensions were operationally defined, the dimensions were validated by correlating the dimensions with the course syllabuses. It was found that 100% of the operationally defined dimensions of competence were covered in the course syllabuses offered by five English departments. The dimensions were also field-reviewed through a survey. Responses from the survey were listed and compared to the matrix of competence dimensions. Data analysis was based on the key words found in the responses. Although there were different wordings in the responses, conceptually they referred to the same domains. For example one respondent answered:

*An English teacher should master the content subject and be able to transfer it to the students, so the students are able to comprehend it.*

From the response, it was clear that the key words were *content subject mastery*, *ability to transfer the knowledge*, and *students' ability to comprehend the subject*. These responses would correlate with domains such as content knowledge and teaching skills. *Students' ability to comprehend the subject* match the dimension of teaching skills because the matrix did not list student's learning outcomes as a single dimension.

Another respondent answered:

*The teacher should understand the lesson he or she teaches, so that he or she*

*could teach the material well.*

Although the respondents used different expressions, *understand the lesson, could teach the material, and well*, these responses could be matched to the same domains, content knowledge and teaching skills. Student's learning outcomes were embedded in the concept of **could teach the material well**. This response is consistent with the belief that teaching only happens when the student learns.

According to one respondent:

*Deliver the material with a good command of English, then the students understand and have the skills of the material taught.*

This statement was related to teaching skills and language competence. The word *deliver material* signified teaching, while the word *a good command of English* implied English language competence. *The students understand and have the skills of the material taught* once again justified the paradigmatically paired teaching and learning.

The findings showed that the responses fitted into three headings: English language competence, content knowledge, and teaching skills. The analysis showed that most of the respondents' answers were covered in the dimensions in the matrix.

### ***Development of performance tasks to assess competence dimensions***

The second finding related to the development of performance tasks to assess competence dimensions. To start the development, each dimension was given performance indicators, as shown in Table 2. Observing the indicators developed thoroughly, the researcher selected performance tasks so that the candidates could exhibit the required dimensions. The selection resulted in two performance tasks; lesson planning and teaching performance. The rubrics were developed to assess teachers' performance to develop a lesson plan and to teach an English lesson.

The rubrics were validated by bringing them in an FGD with three consultants. The consultants agreed that the performance rubrics could assess competence of high school teachers of English. Their reason was that almost all indicators of operationally defined dimensions were covered and assessed accordingly. According to one of the consultants:

*the assessment cannot assess 100% all the aspects what competence needed to cover, it is ok, though, as long as the dimensions were covered somewhere in the assessment. I observed that all dimensions were covered.*

Table 2. Performance indicators for each dimension

Domains/Dimensions	Operational Definitions	Indicators
Domain: English Language Competence		
Language Skills	Can understand the main ideas of a discourse, interact with students fluently, and produce clear discourse in presenting and explaining lesson content.	Understands the main ideas of a discourse.
		Interacts with students fluently.
		Produces clear discourse in presenting and explaining lesson content.
Linguistic	Can use vocabulary correctly and appropriately, maintain grammatical accuracy, pronounce the words or sentences correctly and naturally, and write accurately.	Uses vocabulary correctly and appropriately.
		Maintains grammatical accuracy.
		Pronounces words or sentences correctly and naturally.
		Writes accurately.
Sociocultural	Can express ideas politely in formal or informal expressions appropriate to the situation and participants involved.	Expresses ideas appropriate to the situations and participants involved.
Domain: Content Knowledge		
Text Types	Can organise information in a spoken and written text based on the conventions in a particular context.	Masters the speech act in oral language and rhetoric of written language.
Grammar Points	Can show mastery of grammar points being taught.	Masters the grammar points being discussed.
Domain: Teaching skills		
Objectives	Can formulate statements of intended learning outcomes.	Formulates communicative competence as intended learning outcomes.
		Uses observable verbs.
Material Development	Can produce learning and teaching materials that integrate learning objectives, engaging learning tasks, and assessment related to materials.	Produces learning and teaching materials relevant to the learning objectives.
		Produces learning tasks that engage students.
		Determines what constitute evidences that students have achieved the competences
		Designs performance indicators to assess students' achievement.
Management of Learning	Can organize pair, group, and class work, give classroom commands, time a lesson, and maintain attention.	Organizes pair, group, and class works.
		Gives classroom commands clearly.
		Times a lesson effectively.
		Maintains the students' attention
Teaching Techniques	Can apply teaching techniques that promote students engagement.	Has the students engaged in the activities.
Learning Styles	Can stimulate the students to use multiple modes of information processing.	Entertains the students through varied activities to facilitate multiple senses.
Learning Strategies	Can demonstrate to the students how to learn.	Teaches learners how to learn.
Qualities of Engaging teacher	Can perform verbal and non-verbal expressions to encourage the students to participate.	Addresses the students by names.
		Uses icebreakers to warm up the class.
		Generates students' excitement and enthusiasm.

The consultants also agreed that the tasks developed had validity argument in the sense that the tasks assessed what they were supposed to assess. One consultant said,

*The tasks, especially the teaching performance, were very much related to what the candidates were expected to perform.*

The consultants agreed that problems might appear in the marking system where judgment from the examiners was called to measure candidates' responses, and thus as one consultant said, "*Because the performance tasks were categorized into subjective test, the marking should be clearer, otherwise the judgment will be too varied*". The response was used to improve the descriptors and respective scales.

During the trial phase, the research calculated the correlation coefficient between the two scores given by two examiners. The correlation coefficient was 0.71 in lesson planning, and 0.68 in teaching performance. Since the level acceptance of coefficient correlation was between 0.60-0.90 (Hughes, 2003), the inter-rater reliability for the performance tasks was considered to be at an acceptable level. This implied that the descriptors in the rubrics used were also acceptable. The finding showed that the rubric descriptors were clear enough to guide the examiners in marking the performance of the six teachers participated. The performance tasks could differentiate which candidates were considered competent and which were not.

## **Discussion**

The findings are very important for those who are interested in improving the quality of high school teachers of English in Indonesia. Institutions that conduct English teacher education can use the findings in redirecting and focusing on the target competence. School principals can adapt the performance tasks in developing instrument to assess teachers for their own schools and context. The findings could explain what constitutes competent high school teachers of English in Indonesia.

The ability to communicate in English distinguishes an English teacher from other subject teachers. The language is used not only as a medium of instruction, but at the same time is used as language exposure for the students. In the context of high schools in Indonesia, this competence becomes more essential, because most students rely on the teacher's language as the model. This is because in Indonesia English is a foreign language and the students' ability to communicate in English is the learning outcome, and thus, the teacher's ability to use English plays an important function in the classroom.

Competent teachers, as shown in the findings, should also have content knowledge about the English language. This requirement is relevant because English teachers who have this knowledge will explain the material confidently because they understand the concept. Content knowledge also enables the teachers to help their students when they have difficulties in understanding particular concepts. Content knowledge covers the mastery of the grammar points being taught, speech functions in the spoken language, and rhetoric in written language. The high school curriculum is genre-based text; the material

the teachers should teach mostly relates to the speech functions in spoken language and rhetoric in the written language. With this knowledge at hands, English teacher can transfer the content knowledge to their students to help students achieve the intended communicative competence.

Having strong content knowledge will not give many benefits to the students,—if the teacher does not have skills to transfer it into effective teaching techniques. In language teaching, these skills should be specifically designed for English teaching. Shulman (1986, p. 9) refers to this as “pedagogical content knowledge”. The findings support Shulman’s assertion that teachers should know the subject they teach and have the ability to transfer the knowledge in effective teaching techniques adapted to their own classroom contexts. In Indonesia, where English is considered as a foreign language, this should be elaborated further into adapting the teaching techniques into typical Indonesia classrooms. For example, the teacher should have the ability to teach large classes, because in Indonesia most classes consist of 35 to 40 students. The teacher should have the ability to motivate students so that the students are engaged in learning.

Considering the typical condition of high schools in Indonesia, the present research strongly argues that students’ engagement should be the priority. The field-review shows that being able to teach is always related to the students’ mastery or achievement. The findings show that a competent English teacher is the one who can engage the students in the learning process. This engagement can be achieved through activities starting from lesson planning to real teaching in the classroom. The engagement should begin very early in the lesson plan a teacher develops. An engaging lesson plan states the purposeful communicative competence the students should achieve, it outlines performances that prove what the students learn, and it describes the procedures to assess these performances.

From the findings, it is clear that in the classroom, a competent teacher should be able to manage the classroom to establish classroom atmosphere conducive for students’ learning. The teacher should use varied techniques to facilitate students’ different learning styles, and at the same time teach them how to learn. The most important consideration is that the technique engages the students in their learning process. The findings suggest that a teacher of English should be able to motivate and involve students in their learning. This is in line with Barkley’s view (2010) that students’ engagement in a learning process is derived from their motivation and active involvement.

## **Conclusion**

The first domain of competence shown in the present research is English language competence. This concludes that high school teachers of English should be able to communicate in the language. To communicate means to comprehend, to interact, and to produce a discourse correctly and appropriately. Communicating correctly and appropriately requires the use of grammatically correct language that is appropriate to the situation and participation involved. Related to the context of English teaching at high schools in Indonesia, this finding is relevant—considering that high school students are

expected to display communicative competence in English.

The present research has shown that content knowledge is another domain of competence. Competent teachers of English should be able to demonstrate content knowledge of the material they teach. In the context of English language teaching at high school in Indonesia, this knowledge is what English teachers teach as it is stated in the high school curriculum. The curriculum clearly states that communicative competence is the ultimate learning outcome. Among the content knowledge related to communicative competence as outlined in the curriculum are grammar and discourse.

The present research has also confirmed that English teachers should have skills in teaching content knowledge in a pedagogically engaging learning. It is clear that teachers do not only need to know what to teach but also how to teach. English teachers in their efforts to help their students' success, strive to find the best ways to teach, so that the students are engaged in the learning process. In the Indonesian context, English teachers should be able to manage their big classes, provide varied teaching techniques to cater different types of students learning styles, to motivate, and to involve the students. There are methodological aspects specifically designed to teach English as a foreign language. For high school teachers of English in Indonesia, these methodological aspects should consider characteristics of the EFL context in Indonesia.

This research also concludes that competence of high school teachers of English in Indonesia could be assessed using two performance tasks developed in the present research. The rubric for lesson plans covers dimensions of language competence in writing grammatically correct English, formulating purposeful competence, and developing teaching and learning materials that integrate the objective, evidences that constitute students' learning, and the students' performance indicators. The rubric for teaching performance covers dimensions of English language competence that consists of oral/written communication, linguistic and sociocultural competences, content knowledge, learning management, teaching techniques, learning styles, learning strategies, and qualities of engaging teacher.

The findings reaffirm that the three domains; language competence, content knowledge, and teaching skills are integrated. The findings clearly show that competence in teaching English involves the intertwining of those three domains. The implication is that an English teacher who has content knowledge about English language and transfers that knowledge to engage learning using *good* English language can be considered as a competent English teacher.

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