

**METU English Proficiency Exam:
Perceptions and Experiences of
Freshman Students**

[February 15, 2013]

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1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to examine student perceptions and experiences regarding various aspects of the new version of Middle East Technical University (METU) English Proficiency Exam (EPE).

To this end, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) *What are the perceptions of freshman students about the new version of the English Proficiency Exam (EPE) in terms of the following?*
 - a) *the difficulty level of the components*
 - b) *the factors underlying their EPE performance*
 - c) *the time allowed to respond to the items in EPE*
 - d) *the reliability and validity of EPE*
- 2) *To what extent do freshman students experience problems in understanding the English-medium instruction in their departmental courses?*

2. METHOD

In order to seek answers to the research questions proposed, a questionnaire was devised and administered in the middle of the fall term of the 2012-2013 academic year to Freshman students, who had taken the new version of the EPE the previous semester.

The questionnaire consisted primarily of two sections. Section A included items on the demographic background of the participants, while section B was comprised of a total of seven items, five of which were designed to generate quantitative data, while two were open-ended items designed to produce qualitative data. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages and mean and deviation scores, while the qualitative data were analyzed using the content analysis method.

A purposeful sampling method was used whereby a total of 75 students from each faculty (the faculties of Arts and Science, Education, Architecture, Administration and Engineering) in the Middle East Technical University were administered the questionnaire. After the incomplete surveys were eliminated, the return rate was calculated to be 88%, which equated to 330 participants.

3. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The number and percentage of participants from each faculty are presented below, in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants by Faculty

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Administration	61	18.5	18.7	18.7
	Engineering	71	21.5	21.7	40.4
	Arts and Science	66	20.0	20.2	60.6
	Education	56	17.0	17.1	77.7
	Architecture	73	22.1	22.3	100.0
	Total	327	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.9		
Total		330	100.0		

Of the 330 participants, 56.1% (n=185) were female, while 43.9% were male (n=145) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Gender of Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	145	43.9	43.9	43.9
	female	185	56.1	56.1	100.0
	Total	330	100.0	100.0	

As for the participants' high school background, a significant proportion of the participants were graduates of Turkish Anatolian High Schools (54.5%, n=180). Then followed the graduates of public high schools (13.6%, n=45), teacher education schools (10.9%, n=36), and science high schools (8.8%, n=29). The rest of the participants were graduates of various other high schools as presented in Table 3.

Table3: High School Background of Participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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Valid	Science high school	29	8.8	8.9	8.9
	Anatolian high school	180	54.5	55.4	64.3
	Public high school	45	13.6	13.8	78.2
	Private high school	20	6.1	6.2	84.3
	Teacher education high school	36	10.9	11.1	95.4
	Military school	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Other	14	4.2	4.3	99.7
	Total	325	98.5	100.0	
Missing	System	5	1.5		
Total		330	100.0		

A significant proportion of the participants had entered university with a Maths and Science (MF) score (61.2%, n=202). This is followed by those entering university with a Turkish and Maths score type (17%, n=56). Those entering university with other score types constitute a smaller percentage of the participants (see Table 4).

Table 4: University Entrance Score Type

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MF	202	61.2	66.2	66.2
	TM	56	17.0	18.4	84.6
	EA	8	2.4	2.6	87.2
	YÖS	12	3.6	3.9	91.1
	YDS	5	1.5	1.6	92.8
	TS	20	6.1	6.6	99.3
	DGS	1	.3	.3	99.7
	YGS	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	305	92.4	100.0	
Missing	System	25	7.6		
Total		330	100.0		

A majority of the participants attended English Preparatory Classes at the Department of Basic English (91.8%, n=303). Of the 330 participants, only a very small percentage (7.9%, n=26) were exempted from the classes at the Department of Basic English (DBE) (Table 5).

Table 5: Percentage of Students Attending DBE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	303	91.8	92.1	92.1
	No	26	7.9	7.9	100.0
Total		329	99.7	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.3		
Total		330	100.0		

Of the participants who attended DBE classes, 38.8% (n=128) had completed the intermediate level, 36.1% (n=119) had completed the pre-intermediate level, 13.6% (n=45) had completed the upper-intermediate level and a small percentage of the students (3.3% , n=11) had completed the advanced level when they sat for the new version of the English Proficiency Exam in their second term at DBE (Table 6).

Table 6: Population distribution of participants according to their groups in the second term at DBE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Pre-intermediate	119	36.1	39.3	39.3
	Intermediate	128	38.8	42.2	81.5
	upper intermediate	45	13.6	14.9	96.4
	Advanced	11	3.3	3.6	100.0
	Total	303	91.8	100.0	
Missing	System	27	8.2		
Total		330	100.0		

The score ranges earned by the participants are as follows (Table 7):

Table 7: EPE Final Score

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	59.5-69.5	210	63.6	66.2	66.2
	70-79.5	94	28.5	29.7	95.9
	80-89.5	13	3.9	4.1	100.0
	Total	317	96.1	100.0	
Missing	System	13	3.9		
Total		330	100.0		

4. RESULTS

4. 1 Test takers' perceived level of difficulty of the EPE components

A five-point likert scale, ranging from 1 (*very easy*) to 5 (*too difficult*) was used to measure students' perceptions and experiences regarding the difficulty level of each of the seven components in the new version of the EPE (Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, Note-taking, Paragraph Writing, Cloze Test, Dialogue Completion, and Response to a Situation).

As can be observed in Table 8, when the responses of total participants are considered, the means for each component fall within the range of 2.54-3.42, which indicates *average level of difficulty*. Yet, the mean averages closer to the *difficult* range (4.00-4.99) belong to reading comprehension (X=3.42) and cloze test (X=3.21). On the other hand, the lowest mean scores belong to dialogue completion (X=2.63) and response to a situation (X=2.55), which indicates *below average level of difficulty*.

Table 8: Perceived difficulty levels

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Listening comprehension	326	1.00	5.00	3.1319	.83266
Reading comprehension	327	1.00	5.00	3.4220	.84316
Note-taking	327	1.00	5.00	3.1193	.91737
Paragraph writing	326	1.00	5.00	3.0061	.92152
Cloze test	324	1.00	5.00	3.2068	1.01253
Dialogue completion	323	1.00	5.00	2.6285	.97391
Response to a situation	322	1.00	5.00	2.5466	.99813
Valid N (listwise)	317				

When the mean scores of the difficulty level experienced by the participants from the five different faculties are compared, except for the participants from the Faculty of Architecture, it is observed that the remaining four participant groups display the same pattern: they find the *reading* component and then the *cloze* component most difficult, while they find the *dialogue completion* and *response to situations* the least difficult components. However, the participants from the Faculty of Architecture seem to be experiencing problems in listening and note-taking as well as in reading. The findings reveal that their perceived level of difficulty in the *cloze* component falls within the range of *below average level of difficulty*, which is different from the findings for the participants from the other faculties. For further comparisons, you may refer to Table 9.

Table 9: Difficulty levels as perceived by students from various faculties

faculty and department		Listening comprehension difficulty	Reading comprehension difficulty	Note-taking difficulty	Paragraph writing difficulty	Cloze difficulty	Dialogue completion difficulty	Response to a situation difficulty
Engineering	Mean	3.08	3.43	3.04	2.92	3.21	2.63	2.53
	N	71	71	70	71	71	71	71
	SD	.731	.750	.939	1.032	.969	1.031	1.066
Arts and Science	Mean	3.20	3.34	3.15	3.21	3.50	2.66	2.48
	N	64	64	65	65	62	62	60
	SD.	.911	.801	.833	.976	.987	.886	.929
Education	Mean	3.35	3.57	3.26	3.01	3.23	2.69	2.69
	N	56	56	56	56	55	55	55
	SD	.840	.891	1.017	.943	1.088	1.051	1.120
Architecture	Mean	3.00	3.31	2.98	2.95	2.87	2.53	2.50
	N	72	73	73	72	73	73	73
	SD	.888	.864	.873	.758	.912	.898	.835
Administrative Sciences	Mean	3.08	3.50	3.21	2.93	3.33	2.67	2.56
	N	60	60	60	59	60	59	60
	SD	.743	.911	.922	.887	1.019	1.024	1.063
Total	Mean	3.13	3.42	3.12	3.00	3.21	2.63	2.55
	N	323	324	324	323	321	320	319
	SD	.830	.842	.916	.924	1.007	.973	.998

4.2 Factors Contributing to Success in EPE

The participants (N=330) were asked to rate the extent to which possible factors contributed to their success in EPE on a five point Likert scale, where 1 indicates 'to a small extent' (0-20%) and 5 indicates 'to a big extent' (81-100%). The response rate to the items in this section was high (93.3 % and above), with the exception of *Item 2-contribution of non-METU English education* (87.3 %). This may mean that some students did not attend any English courses outside of METU (e.g. private language schools, private lessons), thus found this item *inapplicable*. As can be seen in Table 10, the factors that are rated the highest are as follows:

1. *Prep school at METU* (X= 3.55)
2. *extra listening tasks* (X=3.39)
3. *high motivation towards learning English* (X=3.16)
4. *contribution of test preparation materials* (X=3.08)

However, the means for each of these three factors fall in the range of 3.00-3.99, which shows *medium level of contribution to success in EPE*. That is, the participants, on average, did not report any one of these factors to have a high effect (4 and above, or 61% and above) on their exam performance. Regarding the other factors inquired in the survey, the participants did *not* rate *extra reading* (X=2.51), *regular study* (X=2.42), and *non-METU English education* as significant contributory factors in their EPE performance. It is somewhat pleasing to see that, overall, *the English preparation education at METU* received the highest rating (X=3.55) as a factor contributing to success in the EPE.

Table 10 : Factors contributing to success in EPE

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.
Contribution of prep school	314	1,00	5,00	3,5573	1,17681
Contribution of non-metu Eng educ	290	1,00	5,00	1,9310	1,32923
Contribution of regulary	311	1,00	5,00	2,4244	1,29013
Contribution of extra reading	317	1,00	5,00	2,5174	1,20804
Contribution of extra listening	318	1,00	5,00	3,3931	1,28552
Contribution of test prep material	316	1,00	5,00	3,0823	1,27224
High motivation towards learning Eng	320	1,00	5,00	3,1656	1,27457
Valid N (listwise)	272				

Table 10 reveals more detailed information on the factors contributing to success in the EPE, including cross-tabulation of participants' ratings of the contributory factors by their *faculties* (The faculties of Administration, Engineering, Arts and Sciences, Education, and Architecture). The cross-tabulation of the respondents' ratings of the extent to which the factors listed contributed to their EPE success reveals three major results:

1. On the whole, the ranking of the first three factors (i.e the components that are generally rated the highest by the respondents) remains the same. In other words, of the five faculties, four faculties again give the highest average rating to *Prep school at METU*. This is followed by *extra listening tasks*, and *having high motivation towards learning English* in the same order.
2. In the faculty of Arts and Sciences only the ranking differs drastically, for the respondents from this faculty rate *extra listening tasks* (*The listening activities done from various English*

sources outside of class, songs, films, news) (X=3.73) as a more influential factor than *Prep school at METU* (X=3.39) in their success in EPE, and they rate *test preparation (the sources used to prepare for the exam)* (X=3.26) as a more influential factor than *having high motivation to English* (X=3.21) in their success in EPE.

3. In the faculty of Engineering, the ranking is almost the same only that *test preparation materials (the sources used to prepare for the exam)* (X=2.86) is rated slightly higher than *having high motivation towards learning English* (X=2.85). What is more striking here is that as regards the *high motivation towards learning English* factor, the respondents from the faculty of Engineering give the lowest rating (X=2.85). In other words, in the present sample, the faculty of Engineering seem to be the least motivated towards learning English; thus, when compared with other faculties, they perceive this factor as less contributory to their success in EPE.
4. Among all the five faculties, the faculty of Education gives the highest rating to *the English preparation education at METU* (X=3.94) as a factor contributing to success in EPE. In other words, the respondents from the faculty of Education seem to perceive that they benefited from the *the English preparation education at METU* more than the other faculties did.

For further analysis, you may refer to Table 10.

Table 10 Factors Contributing To Success in EPE by Faculty

Faculty		Education at DBE	Non-metu Eng educ	contribution of regular study	extra reading	extra listening tasks	test prep material	high motiv. to learn English
administration	Mean	3.6379	1.8947	2.2881	2.5085	3.3793	3.0517	3,2034
	N	58	57	59	59	58	58	59
	Std. Deviation	1.10340	1.23468	1.23248	.98913	1,37430	1.20558	1.20028
engineering	Mean	3,4776	2.1587	2.2615	2,1324	3,1029	2,8636	2.8551
	N	67	63	65	68	68	66	69
	Std. Deviation	1.23532	1.51558	1.26586	1.25668	1,36195	1.41298	1.40666
science and arts	Mean	3.3906	1.9483	2.4032	2.6406	3.7302	3.2615	3.2188
	N	64	58	62	64	63	65	64
	Std. Deviation	1.19013	1.35624	1.26049	1.13203	1.20759	1.20256	1.21458
education	Mean	3.9455	1.9574	2.8491	2.8889	3.5536	3.3929	3.6607
	N	55	47	53	54	56	56	56
	Std. Deviation	.98917	1.38246	1.26181	1.16013	1.24929	1.18596	1.10003
architecture	Mean	3.4179	1.6349	2.3768	2.4348	3.2143	2.8529	2.9710

	N	67	63	69	69	70	68	69
	Std. Deviation	1.28097	1.08214	1.35149	1.32263	1.17822	1.27273	1.28305
	Mean	3.5595	1.9167	2.4221	2.5032	3.3841	3.0735	3.1609
Total	N	311	288	308	314	315	313	317
	Std. Deviation	1.18137	1.32255	1.28526	1.20236	1.28752	1.27263	1.27388

4.3 Students' Perceptions Regarding the Number of Items and Time Allowed for Each Component in EPE

Participants were asked to comment on the sufficiency of the time allowed for each component. The findings revealed that a only 51% of the participants found the time allowed for reading sufficient, while they found the time allowed sufficient for the listening comprehension (79.5%), note-taking (88.2%), cloze (92.5%), dialogue completion (93.1%), response to situations (94.1%) and paragraph writing (83%) components. There were some remarks claiming that the time allowed was even too much for the dialogue completion and response to a situation components.

As for the number of items in each component, overall there seemed to be no problem with the number of items. However, as the items and the texts in the reading component were found to be difficult, the participants claimed that more time should have been allocated to this section.

4.4 Difficulties Students Experience in Following the Departmental Courses

The participants (N=330) were asked to identify whether they experience certain problems related to the language of English in their departmental courses by marking one of the response categories of 'yes', 'no' and 'sometimes'. Table 11, which summarizes the central tendencies, reveals a major finding: participants do not report difficulties as to receptive skills, while they do so regarding productive skills. To be more specific,

1. participants identify writing *short responses to questions* (n=18, 5.5%), *understanding departmental lectures* (n=27, 8.2%), and *reading comprehension* (n=30, 9.1%) as non-problem areas. Even if the data is analyzed by combining the response categories of 'yes' and 'sometimes' into a single category of 'yes', *writing short responses to questions* still emerges as the least difficult area (32.8%). All these three areas are the ones wherein students rely mostly on receptive skills (reading and listening) and/or produce only short responses;

2. *participating in class discussions* (n=100, 30.3%) is rated by the participants as the greatest area of difficulty in following departmental courses. This is followed by *writing long texts* (n=97, 29.4%). If the data is analyzed by combining the response categories of ‘yes’ and ‘sometimes’ into a single category of ‘yes’, these two areas emerge as even more difficult. It is, then, revealed that, of the total of 323 participants, 229 participants report to have always or sometimes difficulties with *participating in class discussions* (69.4%). Likewise, of the total of 324 participants, 248 participants report to have always or sometimes difficulties with *writing long texts such as reports and essays* (75.2%). As one can see, these two areas are the ones that require producing lengthy responses, elaborating ideas, organizing oral and written responses, that is productive skills (speaking and writing).

For further comparison, please refer to Table 11 on the following page.

Table 11: *Perceived Difficulty Levels in Departmental Courses*

Difficulty in note-taking while listening to lecturer

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. %
Valid yes	74	22.4	23.0	23.0
Valid no	115	34.8	35.7	58.7
Valid sometimes	133	40.3	41.3	100.0
Total	322	97.6	100.0	
Missing System	8	2.4		
Total	330	100.0		

Difficulty in reading comprehension

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. %
Valid yes	30	9.1	9.3	9.3
Valid no	132	40.0	41.0	50.3
Valid sometimes	160	48.5	49.7	100.0
Total	322	97.6	100.0	
Missing System	8	2.4		
Total	330	100.0		

Difficulty in writing short responses

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. %
Valid yes	18	5.5	5.6	5.6
Valid no	211	63.9	66.1	71.8
Valid sometimes	90	27.3	28.2	100.0
Total	319	96.7	100.0	
Missing System	11	3.3		
Total	330	100.0		

Difficulty in asking questions orally

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. %
Valid yes	84	25.5	26.0	26.0
Valid no	112	33.9	34.7	60.7
Valid sometimes	127	38.5	39.3	100.0
Total	323	97.9	100.0	
Missing System	7	2.1		
Total	330	100.0		

Difficulty in participating in class discussions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. %
Valid yes	100	30.3	31.0	31.0
Valid no	94	28.5	29.1	60.1
Valid sometimes	129	39.1	39.9	100.0
Valid Total	323	97.9	100.0	
Missing System	7	2.1		
Total	330	100.0		

Difficulty in writing long texts				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. %
Valid yes	97	29.4	29.9	29.9
Valid no	76	23.0	23.5	53.4
Valid sometimes	151	45.8	46.6	100.0
Valid Total	324	98.2	100.0	
Missing System	6	1.8		
Total	330	100.0		

Table 12 demonstrates a cross-tabulation of the frequencies of the difficulties experienced in the department by faculty. When the difficulties as identified by participants from the five different faculties are compared, three major results are found:

1. Although, overall, it was observed that the students experience the least difficulty in *writing short responses to questions*, *understanding departmental lectures*, and *reading comprehension*, a closer analysis of the data reveals that the majority of students who reported difficulty are comprised of students from the faculty of Architecture. Of the total of 27 respondents who reported difficulty in *understanding departmental lectures*, 11 (40%), and of the total of 30 respondents who reported difficulty in *reading comprehension*, 12 (40%) are from the faculty of Architecture. Again, of the total of 17 respondents who reported difficulty in *writing short responses to questions*, 6 (35%) are from the faculty of Education, and 5 (29%) are from the faculty of Architecture. This may signal that the three areas reported to be the least difficult may be a source of problem in the faculty of Architecture, in particular.
2. Overall, it was found that the students experience the greatest difficulty in *participating in class discussions*, and *writing long texts*. However, a closer analysis of the data pointed to the fact that the majority of students who reported the highest levels of difficulty are from the faculty of Arts and Sciences. Of the total of 99 respondents who reported difficulty in *participating in class discussions*, 28 are from the faculty of Arts and Sciences, and similarly, of the total of 96 respondents who reported difficulty in *writing long texts*, 23 are from the

same faculty. That is, although the productive skills of *participating class discussions*, and *writing long texts* seem to be the most critical problem areas in following the departmental courses across the university, these two areas might need further attention in the faculty of Arts and Sciences.

3. Faculty of Engineering, in general, seems to report the least difficulty in the possible problem-areas listed in the survey. In other words, this faculty is generally the first or the second faculty to report the least difficulty related with the areas listed.

For further comparisons, refer to Table 12.

Table 12: Difficulties in Understanding Departmental Courses by Faculty

		Faculty					Total
		Admin.	Engin.	Science & Arts	Educ.	Arch.	
Difficulty in understanding department lecturer	yes	6	3	5	2	11	27
	no	27	41	22	26	31	147
	sometimes	27	25	38	28	30	148
Total		60	69	65	56	72	322

		Faculty					Total
		Admin.	Engin.	Science & Arts	Educ.	Arch.	
difficulty in note-taking while listening to lecturer	yes	16	11	15	14	17	73
	no	18	36	23	14	23	114
	sometimes	25	21	26	28	32	132
Total		59	68	64	56	72	319

		Faculty					Total
		Admin.	Engin.	Science & Arts	Educ.	Arch.	
difficulty in reading comprehension	yes	9	2	1	6	12	30
	no	23	36	29	16	26	130
	sometimes	27	30	34	34	34	159
Total		59	68	64	56	72	319

		Faculty					Total
		Admin.	Engin.	Science & Arts	Educ.	Arch.	
difficulty in writing short responses	yes	4	1	1	6	5	17
	no	38	44	46	32	50	210
	sometimes	17	23	16	17	16	89
Total		59	68	63	55	71	316

		Faculty					Total
		Admin.	Engin.	Science & Arts	Educ.	Arch.	
difficulty in writing long texts	yes	14	18	23	21	20	96
	no	15	22	11	10	18	76
	sometimes	31	29	30	25	34	149
Total		60	69	64	56	72	321

		Faculty					Total
		Admin.	Engin.	Science & Arts	Educ.	Arch.	
difficulty in asking questions orally	yes	19	13	21	14	16	83
	no	21	28	20	9	33	111
	sometimes	20	28	22	33	23	126
Total		60	69	63	56	72	320

		Faculty					Total
		Admin.	Engin.	Science & Arts	Educ.	Arch.	
difficulty in participating in class discussions	yes	20	16	28	14	21	99
	no	16	28	12	10	28	94
	sometimes	24	25	13	32	23	127
Total		60	69	63	56	72	320

4.5 The Possible Reasons Underlying Difficulties Experienced in Speaking in Class

Subsequently, item (5) further inquires the possible reasons for the last two difficulty areas listed in item (4), which are *asking questions in class* and *participating in class discussions*. Actually, those who identified these two areas as a source of difficulty are to respond to this item. As the respondents can check more than one box here, or as they may not check any box, the ‘percent’ column in Table 13, which is based on the number of respondents as a percentage of all participants (N=330), including the participants who did not check any boxes, helps us understand possible reasons. The analysis of the frequencies and percentages reveals that the major reason for the difficulties under focus is *being afraid to make mistakes while speaking* (40.9%), The second most highly rated reason is the *respondents’ belief that their language proficiency level is inadequate* (34.5%). Thirdly, the respondents identified *feeling embarrassed to speak in class* (32.1%) as a reason for not being able to ask questions in class or participating in class discussions. Only 87 respondents (10%) report *lack of opportunity to speak in class* as a reason for these problems.

Table 13: Reasons for Difficulty in Speaking in Departmental Courses

Low Proficiency in English				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	,00	35	10,6	23,3
Valid	yes	114	34,5	99,3
	2,00	1	,3	100,0
	Total	150	45,5	100,0
Missing	System	180	54,5	
Total		330	100,0	

Embarrassed to Speak in Class				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	,00	37	11,2	25,9
Valid	yes	106	32,1	100,0
	Total	143	43,3	100,0
Missing	System	187	56,7	
Total		330	100,0	

Fear of Making Mistakes while Speaking

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
.00	27	8,2	16,6	16,6
Valid Yes	135	40,9	82,8	99,4
11,00	1	,3	,6	100,0
Total	163	49,4	100,0	
Missing System	167	50,6		
Total	330	100,0		

Lack of Oppurtunity to Speak in Class

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
.00	54	16,4	62,1	62,1
Valid yes	33	10,0	37,9	100,0
Total	87	26,4	100,0	
Missing System	243	73,6		
Total	330	100,0		

4.6 Students' Perceptions Regarding the Reliability and the Validity of EPE

The participants were also asked to mark whether they believed the new version of the EPE measured their level of English proficiency in a reliable and valid way. They were asked to mark one of the three response categories: 'yes', 'partially', 'no'. A total of 319 participants out of 330 (approximately 96.7%) answered this question. The descriptive statistics revealed that of the 319, who answered this question, 39.7% (n=131) believed EPE did measure students' English proficiency in a reliable and valid way, 21.2% (n=70) believed it did not, and 35.8% (n=118) claimed that EPE only partially measured English proficiency in a realible and valid way. Those participants who marked *partially* or *no* to this question were also asked to answer an open-ended question in order to provide a justification to their response. Of these participants, approximately 84% (n= 158) explained why they believed EPE was not or was only partially a reliable and valid measurement of English proficiency. Here, four major themes emerged: necessity of speaking component in EPE, problems with DBE education, objection to EPE as the sole determiner, and not feeling proficient despite passing EPE.

A commonly reported reason (26%, n=68) was in relation to the necessity of speaking component in EPE. Respondents thought that as they could pass EPE when they actually regarded themselves to be

nonproficient in the speaking skill, then EPE must not be measuring their general proficiency in English in a reliable and valid way. In brief, a significant proportion of the participants, either directly or indirectly, suggested adding a speaking component into EPE, which they believed would not only have an impact on the DBE education but also encourage students to develop their speaking skill. To illustrate, below are some accounts of students from various faculties:

“Asıl ben size sormak istiyorum. Bu sınavı geçenler neden hala İngilizce konuşmıyorlar?” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

“Speaking yok. Bu yokken nasıl sağlıklı olabilir” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Önemli olan dili konuşarak ifade etmektir. ODTÜ’deki öğrencilerin bir çoğu konuşmaya gelince ilkökul seviyesinden öteye geçmiyor” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Kelime ve anlamayı ölçme bakımından İYS yeterli ama iletişimde konuşma problemi yaşıyoruz” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

“Çünkü asıl sıkıntı yaşadığım kısım konuşma ve İYS’de o konu ile ilgili bir şey yok” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

“Speaking konusunda zayıfım. Hocalara soru soramıyorum. Konuşmayı daha sağlıklı bir açıdan ölçmesi gerektiğini düşünüyorum” (A student from the Faculty of Architecture).

“Bence İYS konuşma da içermeli çünkü en çok zorluk çektiğimiz konu o. İYS’de konuşma olursa, buna bağlı olarak derslerde de daha çok buna ağırlık verilir” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

“Bölümdeki derslerde daha iyi etkileşim yapabilmek için konuşmaya daha fazla ağırlık verilmeli ve konuşma sınavı olmalı” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“Sınavda konuşma kısmı da olmalı. Belki bu sayede öğrenciler konuşmaya daha çok önem verir ve öğrenmek için gayret eder” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“İngilizce becerisinin yeterli olup olmadığı sadece kağıt üzerinde ölçülmemeli, yazılı sınav haricinde speaking sınavı da olmalı” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Kesinlikle konuşma bölümü olmalıydı” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“I think that there must be speaking section included in EPE because some students may have difficulties while speaking although they are able to give written responses” (A student from the Faculty of Architecture).

“İYS’den 70 ile geçmeme rağmen sınıflarda pafta sunumlarında ne yaptığımı İngilizce açıklayamıyorum. Bu tamamen dil eksikliğinden kaynaklı. Bu yüzden sınavın beni yeterli derecede ölçtüğünü düşünmüyorum” (A student from the Faculty of Architecture).

“Sadece yazılı bir sınavla yeterlik ölçülmez” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

Then there were those responses (43%) in which DBE education was criticized. Some responses indicated problems with the teaching of speaking at the Basic English Department (DBE). Some of these accounts are as follows:

“Speaking kısmında verilen eğitimin yetersiz olduğunu düşünüyorum” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“We didn’t do enough practice I think. I am very good at grammer but I don’t speak fluently” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Speaking dersleri az. Öğrenciler İngilizce biliyor ama konuşamıyor” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Yazıp ta konuşamayan bir sürü insan var hazırlığı geçmiş olan. İngilizce sadece yazmak değil, bizim eğitimimiz bundan ibaret” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Daha çok sınav geçme var. Gerçek öğrenmek için değil. Speaking kısmına çok önem verilmelidir” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

“Bilgi konusunda bir sıkıntı yok. Fakat özellikle sözlü iletişim konusunda yeterli donanıma sahip olmadan bölüme geçiyoruz. Bu konuda öğrenciler ilk hatayı kendinde aramalı ama bu yine de hazırlık eğitiminin bu açığını kapatmıyor” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

“Yıl boyunca aldığımız eğitim ile sınavı geçebiliyoruz ama İngilizce iletişim kuramıyoruz. Derslerde öğretim görevlisini takip etmekte zorlanıyoruz” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

“...dili nasıl kullanacağımız konusunda hazırlık eğitimi yetersiz. Hazırlıkta öğrencileri tartışmalarla sunumlarla ya da sınıf içi konuşma aktiviteleri ile bölüme hazırlamalı ki bölümde öğrenciler benim gibi bocalamasın” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

“İngilizce eğitiminde çok önemli bir bölüm olan konuşma eğitimine, becerisine hazırlık eğitiminde çok önem verilmediğini gördüm. Daha doğrusu önem veriliyor ama stresli bir ortamda sınav yaparak veya ders kitaplarındaki beğenmediğim konuşma bölümleriyle. Bu daha zenginleştirilip, daha rahat bir ortam sağlanabilir” (A student from the Faculty of Architecture).

“Gramere çok ağırlık veriliyor. Bir arada kelimeleri iyi bir şekilde öğretmekten ve konuşmaya ağırlık vermekten kaçınıyoruz” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

“Öğrenciler, konuşmaya zorlanmıyor. Sınıflar kalabalık bir dil öğrenmek için. Daha çok teoriden ziyade konuşma ağırlıklı olmalı” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

The fact that instructors spoke in Turkish was also mentioned:

“Sene içinde girdiğim sınıflarda ve arkadaşlarımdan duyduğum kadarıyla Türk olan hocaların sınıfında hep Türkçe konuşuluyor. Sınıfta Türkçe konuşmak tamamen yasaklanmalı ve konuşma değerlendirmede çok etkiye sahip olmalı” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Derste kesinlikle ve kesinlikte Türkçe konuşulmamalı. Bazı hocalar, isim vermek istemiyorum, o kadar çok Türkçe konuşuyor ki, bir de üstelik kendisini veya yakın çevresini anlatıyor. Ders boşa geçmiş oluyor. Ama sıra İYS’ye gelince öğrenciye 30 adet dinleme sorusu koymayı biliyorlar. Öğrenci yapamayınca niye yapmadı oluyor. Belki benim yazdıklarımı kayda almayacaksınız ama derste KESİNLİKLE TÜRKÇE konuşulmamalı...” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

The speaking achievement exam administered as part of the DBE program was also criticized:

“...konuşabilme yeteneğini ölçmüyor, ölçse de bunu 1-2 dakikayla sınırlandırıyor. Genel bir değerlendirme yapmıyor. Belli bir konu veriliyor ve o konuyla ilgili beceriler ölçülüyor ama öğrencinin ilgilendiği veya bilgisinin olup olmadığı bir alan olduğu sorgulanmıyor. Bu yüzden verilen konuyla ilgili becerileri iyi olan öne geçiyor. O kadar iyi olmayan kalmıyor. Bence adil değil” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

Finally, the fact that the DBE education was exam-oriented was also mentioned:

“Çok fazla sınav odaklı bir eğitim aldığımızı düşünüyorum. Aldığım eğitimin dili kullanmaktan ziyade akademik bir birikim sağlamaya yönelik olduğunu düşünüyorum” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

“Daha çok sınav geçmeye, puan toplamaya yönelik eğitim var.”

Some of the participants (approximately 13%) also felt that they overall lacked proficiency, yet they somehow passed EPE. Some of these participants accounted for this by asserting that being proficient in an area or skill could compensate for the other skills in the exam. However, this, they believed, did not mean that they could use the language effectively. Some also thought that EPE was relatively easy to pass by applying some basic test taking strategies or learning some key grammar rules. To illustrate, below are some responses of the participants.

“Kelime ve gramer seviyemin yeterli olduğunu düşünmüyorum. Dinleme kısımlarında hala zorluk çekiyorum” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“Sınavı çok iyi yapan biri dinlemede kötüyse bu açığı rahatlıkla kapatabilmekte... Oysaki dinleme kötü olduğu için bölüm derslerini anlamakta zorluk çekecektir” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“Geçtim ama hala dersleri anlamakta zorlanıyorum” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“...although my word knowledge was clearly not enough to get my point, I was able to score it” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

“Yeterlik sınavını geçmeme rağmen İngilizcem yetersiz” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

“...[hiç bir] sınavın insanın bilgisini [tamamen] ölçebileceğine inanmıyorum. Mesela, ben 10 konulu bir dersten 3 konuyu biliyorum ve bütün sorular benim bildiğim konulardan çıkıyor ve ben %90 başarı sağlarken diğer taraftan başka bir insan 10 konudan 8’ini biliyor ve sınavda %40 başarı sağlıyor. Şimdi kim daha başarılı tartışılır” (A student from the Faculty of Architecture).

“Belirli kalıplara uyulduğu ve belirli kurallar uygulandığı takdirde sınav sonucunda yeterli görülebiliyoruz. Bu nedenle [EPE’nin] çok da sağlıklı olduğuna inanmıyorum” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Düzenli çalışmadan geçebildim. Şu an İngilizcem çok iyi değil” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Sınav sistemini bilmek ve ona göre çalışmak alınan notu oldukça etkiliyor. Bunun böyle olmaması lazım. Sistemi bilen yüksek alıyor. Bilmeyen bocalıyor ne kadar iyi de olsa” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Çok yetersiz olmamıza rağmen birkaç küçük strateji ile geçmek mümkün” (A student from the Faculty of Administration).

Another frequently mentioned reason (18%) as to why they believed EPE was not a reliable and valid measurement tool was its being the sole determiner of students’ English language proficiency. It was noted that both external factors, such as the quality of recordings, and internal factors, such as exam anxiety and loss of concentration may negatively impact the performance of the test takers. Thus, being assessed by means of a single exam on a single day was claimed to be unfair. Participants suggested that their year-long achievement exam results be taken into consideration as well. To illustrate, below are some accounts of students from various faculties:

“Dinleme bölümünde o anki duruma bağlı olarak değişiyor durumumuz. Sesi net duymama ya da sistemden kaynaklı arızalar olabiliyor...” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“Tüm yıl boyunca insanın üstünde ‘geçmek zorundayım’ diye bir baskı oluyor. Bu baskı sınav anında negatif etkiliyor bizi. Sınavda belli bir baraj olmalı tabii ki ama 58.5 alanla 59.5 arasında 1 yıl kaybettirecek bir fark yok diye düşünüyorum. Yıl içerisinde alınan puanlar sadece prof’a girmek için kullanılmamalı. Hazırlık geçmek için kullanılabilir. Böylece sınav anında sıkıntı yaşayanlar için kalma riski azalabilir” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“...bir sınavla İngilizce seviyesi tam olarak ölçülemez. Dinleme esnasında dalabiliyor, dinleyemeyebiliyoruz. Bu dinleme yapamamızın göstergesi değildir” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“İYS'nin İngilizce dilindeki yeterliliğimi sağlıklı biçimde ölçtüğüne inanmıyorum çünkü sınav psikolojisi çok farklı. Bunun dışında yıl içindeki mitermlerin sınıf içi çalışmaların yalnızca İYS'ye giriş için bir ölçüt oluşturmasını çok saçma buluyorum” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“Sene içindeki tüm emek bir kaç saatlik bir sınavla sınınamaz...” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Dönem içinde olduğumuz sınavların sadece sene sonundaki İYS'ye girmemize izin olduğunu öğrenmek beni hayal kırıklığına uğrattı. Bence hazırlık okuyanlara İYS olmamalı. Yüksek puan tuturanlar direk geçmiş sayılmalı...” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Genele yayılmış bir performans ölçümü daha sağlıklı olacaktır. Bir tam gün boyunca konsantrasyonu korumayı gerektiren bir sınavın yeterince sağlıklı olduğunu düşünüyorum.

“Listening kısmı o günkü psikolojiye (heyecan, adaptasyon eksikliği vs)ye bağlı olarak konsantre olmak pek kolay olmuyor. Bu da gerçek dinleme yeteneğinin altında puan almaya sebebiyet veriyor” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

“...belli bir süre içerisinde bütün yıl boyunca alınan eğitimi ölçmek pek mümkün olmayabilir. Onun yerine dönem içinde yapılan midterm, speaking ve quizlerin ortalaması alınabilir” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

“Tek gün ve tek sınavda her şeyi ölçmeye çalışmak mantıklı değil” (A student from the Faculty of Architecture).

“Sınav esnasında herkes o saat içinde bildiklerini tam yansıtmayabilir” (A student from the Faculty of Architecture).

Four minor themes emerged in the qualitative data. Indeed, some students believed that there are the following problems: 1. EPE is inconsistent with other criteria; 2. Reevaluation of the exam is unfair; 3. Cloze test items are not realistic; 4. There is a mismatch between midterm exams and EPE.

Five participants referred to external criteria to compare their own proficiency level and, thus, evaluate whether EPE was a reliable and valid exam. Three of these participants compared their proficiency scores with those of their peers. One compared his/her proficiency score with the score he/she received from the TOEFL, claiming that he/she failed EPE while passing the TOEFL. The other participant made reference to the level of the class he/she was attending at DBE. He/she claimed that completing the Advanced level at DBE, yet failing the EPE was conflicting. Three students who made reference to their peers' scores were those who failed but saw that their peers who they claimed to be at an equal or lower proficiency level of English pass the exam, either directly or after submitting a petition for reevaluation of their exam; thus, they believed that EPE may only partially evaluate their English

proficiency level. There were other less frequently made remarks. One student (Fac. Of Educ) claimed that if EPE were reliable, the scores would not change after reevaluation. A couple of responses dwelled on the content of EPE. Five participants made reference to the difficulty level of EPE. While two of them claimed EPE to be too difficult, the remaining three believed EPE to be too easy. Three participants mentioned the length of the exam, claiming that it was too long. Another three participants maintained that the exam did not reflect real life needs, giving the cloze test item as an example. Finally, two participants asserted that the content of EPE did not match with the contents of the achievement exams at DBE.

“...ilk senemde 57,5 ile kaldım ve bazı arkadaşlarım itiraz dilekçeleri sonucu notları 59,5a yükselttiler sınıfı geçtiler. Bu durumda hazırlığı geçen arkadaşlarımın benden daha iyi İngilizce bildiklerine inanmıyorum. Aramızdaki iki puanlık fark benim bir seneme mal edilmemeli. Bu konuda daha olumlu çözümler getirilmesi gerektiğine inanıyorum” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

“Seviyesi benden çok daha aşağıda olan sene boyunca çok daha az puan toplayabilen öğrenciler sınavda biraz daha iyi konsantre olabildikleri için muafiyet alabildiler” (A student from the Engineering Faculty).

“Eğer sağlıklı ölçseydi, itiraz sonucu notlar değişmezdi. Her hoca farklı şekilde notlandırınca kimi öğrenciler sınırda kalıyor, kimi öğrenci kıl payı geçiyor. Yani bu notlandırma işinde şans büyük bir faktör.”

4.7 Further Remarks Expressed by the Participants

The last item of the survey asked whether the respondents had any further comments regarding EPE. A total of 54 out of 330 participants (approximately 16.4%) responded to this item. The responses were primarily based on either the quality of education and instructors at DBE or the content of EPE.

(i) Criticisms and suggestions in relation to DBE

Numerous remarks were made regarding the education program at DBE. While some were expressed as criticisms, others were presented as suggestions.

Two participants dwelled on the motivational aspect of the program. They believed that the program should include more enjoyable activities and materials. To illustrate, below is a response by a student from the Faculty of Education:

“Ben dil öğrenmenin önce eğlenceli hale getirilerek gerçekleştirilebileceğine inanıyorum. Hiçbir içeriğe sahip olmayan (en azından eğitimimize katkısı olmadığını gereksiz etkinlik ve bölümler içerdiğini düşünüyorum) kitaplar yerine okumaktan zevk aldığımız metinler içeren ve öğrenciyi teşvik eden bir kitap getirilmeli. Eğlenceli hale getirmekte kastım, konuşabildiğimiz ve anlayabildiğimiz sürece yani iletişim kurabiliyorsak bu bizim için bir sebeptir.”

Other participants (n=5) maintained that more emphasis should be given to the writing and especially speaking skills in the DBE program, claiming that in addition to the academic part, focus should also be laid upon the use of English in daily life. 2 participants suggested that rather than grammar instruction, more emphasis should be laid on the listening and speaking skills. One other participant made reference to the severity of the lack of an effective instruction in the speaking skill with the following words: “Speaking kanayan yaramız.”

Reference was also made (1) to the pace of the program. It was claimed that while the pace of the program implemented in the first semester was very slow, that of the program in the second semester was excessively fast and could barely be completed.

As for the materials used in the classes, 4 participants from the Arts and Sciences Faculty remarked that they did not find them of any benefit. 2 participants suggested that classes be grouped according to faculties and materials be chosen and used accordingly to familiarize them with the terminology of their departments. Moreover, one other participant suggested that they attend departmental courses on Fridays so that they could get used to the terminology unique to their departmental courses. The remaining one participant remarked that he/she did not find Language Leader a useful resource in developing proficiency in English, specifically the speaking skill.

One comment was made in relation to the pop quizzes:

“...pop quizler kalkıp yerine haberli quizler gelmeli. Pop quizler belki öğrencinin devamsızlık yapmasını engelleyebilir fakat öğrenciyi strese sokmaktan ve hazırlıktan nefret etmesine neden olmaktadır” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

Other suggestions made in relation to the program were as follows:

- The SAC should be made accessible more easily.
- Students should be able to sit for EPE in January
- The achievement exam scores should be included in the EPE score
- An on-line collaborative program between METU and a university abroad can be established so that DBE students can chat on-line via a computer camera while teachers monitor them.

In addition to the program implement at DBE, some remarks were also made in relation to the instructors and staff at DBE. First of all, several participants (n=3) attributed their failure in the exam to the behaviour and quality of DBE instructors. One participant mentioned the stress imposed by the instructors. He/she said:

“Sınav zor olsa da bir çok öğrencinin geçmemesinin nedeni hocaların her şeyi gözümüzde büyütmeleri ve daha stresli hale getirmeleri. Sınavı abartmayın. Sadece yapmaları gereken neyse onu yapsınlar. Zaten bu sınav yüzünden bizler yeterince gergin oluyoruz” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

One participant also made reference to the age of the instructors, claiming that there were too many senior instructors who were ineffective. The exact words of this response is as follows:

“...Hazırlıkta çok fazla senior hoca var ve derste verimsiz oluyorlar. Hocaların tribini çekiyoruz derslerde. Bu iş genç öğretmenlere bırakılmalı” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

Some administrative staff were also criticised. One participant criticised the behaviour of the department secretaries. He/she said,

“Hazırlık sekreterliği öğrencilere daha anlayışlı olmalı. Öğrenciler yetişkin birer insandırlar. Onlara onursuzca, anlayışsızlıkla yaklaştırılmamalı” (A student from the Arts and Science Faculty).

Another administrative staff was also severely criticized with the following words:

“Bölüm yetkilisi hanımın öğrencilere olan tutumunu değiştirmesi konusunda uyarılması gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Eğitim-öğretim süreci o kişinin sandığı gibi eskiden kalma öğretmen diktatörlüğüyle gerçekleşmediği gibi öğrencileri okuldan da soğutuyor. Mümkünse mevkisinin değiştirilmesi gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Umarım yazılanlar dikkate alınır” (A student from the Faculty of Architecture).

“Derslerde kitabı bitirme telaşından daha çok okuduğunu ve dinlediğini anlama becerileri geliştirilmekte” (A student from the Faculty of Education).

(ii) Criticisms and suggestions in relation to EPE

The responses made as further remarks regarding EPE can be categorized as those related to the content of the exam, the difficulty level and its administration.

With respect to its content, one participant claimed that the exam was beginning to look more and more like TOEFL or IELTS. He/she recommended that EPE be more unique, mentioning COPE as an example.

From another perspective, the content was criticised by three participants for not being in consistency with the achievement exams of DBE in terms of content and level of difficulty. They also suggested that a certain percentage of the achievement exam scores be included in the proficiency score.

Some specific components of the content were also criticised. One participant urged that the dialogue completion and the response to situations components be replaced.

Two participants suggested that a speaking component be added. This result is consistent with the responses made in the previous item of the questionnaire regarding the addition of the speaking component.

As regards the difficulty level of EPE, 1 participant drew attention to the fact that the difficulty level of each administration should be the same. Another participant (A&S) claimed that EPE was too difficult.

Finally, there were comments, in the form of both criticisms and suggestions, made in relation to the administration of EPE from various perspectives. 1 participant suggested that those who scored between 50-59 be given a make-up EPE. An amnesty student recommended that they be given a refresher course before they are made to sit for EPE. Then there were some comments that indicated that not all students took the exam on equal grounds. One student remarked that while some students sat for the exam in rooms whose windows could not be opened, others took the exam in rooms with an air conditioner. Two other participants also made reference to the hot weather, asserting that sitting for such a long exam in such hot weather was unfair.

