

## Designing English Enrichment Program for Vietnamese Students under the Assessment Standards of Aptis Certificate

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**ABSTRACT:** *The need to develop a suitable English program is urgently required in Vietnam. In fact, designing a framework for assessing English proficiency of Vietnamese students is one of important missions to ensure the education quality and skilled labor forces. This paper presents how English enrichment program according to the assessment standards of APTIS certificate (EEPASAC) was developed. To conduct this paper, the Tyler model was considered and used for the development of the EEPASAC. One hundred and twenty students from a Ho Chi Minh-based university took part in the study by answering the questionnaire and two experts invited to evaluate the EEPASAC. The study found that the EEPASAC may be useful and appropriate for assessment of English proficiency of non-English majors. Furthermore, the results of study will be a useful instruction for universities in developing English enrich programs.*

**KEYWORDS:** *enrichment program; APTIS certificate; assessment; English program; Vietnamese students*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Developing a framework to assess students' English proficiency is a major issue which many countries pay much attention. This assessment is used to identify English competence of learners and help universities design suitable programs. Read (2016) defined the primary goal of English assessment is to provide feedback to students and teachers for enhancing students' English and learning outcomes at academic institutions. Similarly, Tyler (1949) mentioned that the basic principles of developing a curriculum is to help the students to understand problems and know how to solve it properly. In fact, the development of framework for assessing English proficiency cannot be ignored by administrators and teachers at institutions.

In Vietnam, English language is compulsory in most of grades. To evaluate the learners' English proficiency, in 1993 the MOET issued the Decision N<sup>o</sup>177/QĐ-TCBT about English levels A, B, C in Vietnam education system. From 2014, the MOET officially launched the project of the six-level foreign language competency framework according to the CEFR levels. The CEFR framework could be used to evaluate the learners' language proficiency. It describes in a comprehensive way what the learners have to do in order that they could use a language for communication effectively. In reality, the CEFR is increasing the standard way of describing learners' proficiency level in English, particularly in an academic setting. In most of universities, official organizations and corporations are using this framework to evaluate the students' and staff's English proficiency.

In addition, the Tyler model is considered to be a meaningful tool which help institutions build curriculum programs effectively. In fact, this model helps educators and learners attain educational goals in the scientific way with four steps.

In reality, the deployment of CEFR brings many good results to institutions. However, it has some difficulties for non-English majors who have low English background. In addition, under the permission of MOET, universities have the right to develop their own assessment. As a result, the APTIS certificate under the assessment standards of British Council is completely suitable and meaningful for universities in Vietnam. This program is suitable for majors at institutions thanks to its efficiency and flexible assessment. Therefore, this study is going to discuss the EEPASAC and its usefulness in enhancing Vietnamese students' English proficiency. In general, based on the significance of developing a suitable curriculum, the objectives of this study was to find out the effectiveness of the English enrich program under the assessment standards of APTIS certificate. In order to achieve this objective, the research question was formulated as follow:

- How is English enrichment program for Vietnamese students under the assessment standards of APTIS certificate designed?

## **2. THEORETICAL BASIS**

### **2.1. The Introduction of APTIS Certificate**

APTIS is a global English assessment of British Council, a market leader with more than 70 years' experience in language assessment. It has the flexibility in structure and diversity of tests. It is considered as an economical choice for institutions. The assessment of APTIS is useful to evaluate the real language proficiency of students. Marcio (2013) emphasized that APTIS has an influence on choosing the suitable candidates for companies. It is used to assess English language ability in four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The test results are interpreted either on a numerical scale (0-50) or as a CEFR level.

The framework of APTIS assessment follows the regulation of Vietnamese MOET. In 2004, MOET issued the six English competency levels. It is used to assess learners and teachers' English proficiency. With the support of MOET, British Council could deploy the APTIS framework under the general instructions and regulations. As a result, the APTIS certificate is becoming a popular evaluation tool in some of universities and colleges in Vietnam.

APTIS assesses four learners' components in which each score interprets learners' language proficiency. Its scores are interpreted as follows:

#### **Listening**

A0	Not enough to allow for any meaningful inferences about the candidate's ability.
A1	Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.
A2	Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.
B1	Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent.
B2	Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization.
C	Has no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, delivered at fast native speed.

#### **Reading**

A0	Not enough to allow for any meaningful inferences about the candidate's ability.
A1	Can understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words and basic phrases and rereading as required.
A2	Can understand short, simple texts on familiar matters of a concrete type which consist of high frequency everyday or job-related language.
B1	Can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to his/her field and interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension.
B2	Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, using appropriate reference sources selectively.
C	Can understand and interpret critically virtually all forms of the written language.

#### **Speaking**

A0	Not enough to allow for any meaningful inferences about the candidate's ability.
A1	Can produce simple descriptions on mainly personal topics.
A2	Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list
B1	Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of

	interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.
B2	Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.
C	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing well-structured speech with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.

**Writing**

A0	Not enough to allow for any meaningful inferences about the candidate’s ability.
A1	Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.
A2	Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like ‘and’, ‘but’ and ‘because’.
B1	Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.
B2	Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest and shows an ability to use different registers within written texts.
C	Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.

Source: British Council (2015)

**2.2. Tyler’s Model for Curriculum Design in English Subject**

One of the most famous model in designing the curriculum is Tyler model (Hoan, 2011). Tyler defined that curriculum developers or educators must pay attention to three basic factors: learners, social life and content of programs. It is because these three factors are considered the vital step for the entire program. Tyler (1969) considered the model as a cycle process in which each process has an impact on selected curriculum. The process begins with a serious consideration of learning objectives and how they can be achieved by a cycle process.



**Figure1.** Tyler’s model for curriculum planning

The process includes four elements:

- Determine the school’s aims and objectives
- Identify educational experiences that are related to aims and objectives
- Organize the experiences
- Evaluate the aims and objectives

*2.2.1. Aims and Objectives*

Defining aims and objectives must be consistent with the philosophy of the school. Besides they must satisfy the requirements of the education system. Keating (2006) mentioned that the objectives must be relevant to the field of study. In case of Vietnam, the regulations of English proficiency were clearly declared in Decision, Decree and Circular of government and interested stakeholders. Anh (2018) stated that attained objectives show success instructional education programs. Tyler's objectives model can be used to identify and evaluate objectives efficient in design a curriculum.

### *2.2.2. Selection of Learning Experiences*

The second part of the model involves in choosing the suitable learning experiences that help to achieve defined objectives. Tyler states that "the important thing is for students to discover content that is useful and meaningful to them" (Meek, 1993, p. 83). In general, Tyler's model emphasizes the effectiveness of learning experiences. They have an influence on the success of process itself and students. Experiences are those which are familiar to learners' learning habits. In reality, the course books are designed according to the requirements of CEFR levels. Therefore, defining learning experiences becomes easier and more efficient.

### *2.2.3. Organization of Learning Experiences*

After selecting suitable learning experiences, the educators must ensure the organization of learning experiences. Tyler emphasized three major requirements in organizing the learning experiences: continuity, sequence and integration. This continuity process helps to choose the suitable contents for the designed program and help to improve learner's knowledge step by step.

### *2.2.4. Evaluation of Learning Experiences*

Evaluation is the final process of determining to what extent the objectives are realized by the curriculum. According to Tyler, the evaluation of curriculum is the process of matching expected learning outcomes with the achieved outcomes by learners. The evaluation can be obtained in two phases during the class time. The first is formative evaluation and the second is summative evaluation. The evaluation must be used to efficiently evaluate the learners' learning results in accordance with the goals of education. Echols (1973) mentioned that evaluation was a thoroughly articulated theory proceeding from the curriculum assumptions. (p.168).The evaluation is always expected to assess learners' behaviors under educational objectives.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Design**

This study was based on the collection of related theories and data analysis of non-English majors. To develop the curriculum, the four processes of Tyler's model was adapted (Tyler, 1969)

#### **The 1<sup>st</sup> process**

- Determine the aims and objectives

#### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> process**

- Identify educational experiences

#### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> process**

- Organize the experiences

#### **The 4<sup>th</sup> process**

- Evaluate the aims and objectives

### **3.2. Research site**

The research was carried out at a university in Ho Chi City. At this university, there are many majors. Students must accumulate six English levels and attend the B2 English level test at the end of the course. Each English level occupies 3 credits. The whole levels provide students English skills such as listening, reading, speaking and writing. The organization of levels is based on the course book "Four corners". Vietnamese teachers instruct learners' listening, writing and readings. Foreign teachers focus on helping learners improve speaking skills.

### **3.3. Sample and Sampling Process**

In this study, the first - year students (3600 students) were chosen as the population. The purposive sampling was employed to draw the students as the sample from the five classes. One hundred and fifty first - year students recruited for this study came from various departments such as Automation and Control Engineering Technology, Information Technology, Accounting, Electronics, and Business Administration. The ages of the participants were range from 18 to 20 with an average of 18.

**Table1.** *Participants’ general information*

No.	Information	N = 150		
		No. of respondents	Percent	
1	Gender	Male	81	54%
		Female	69	46%
2	Time for learning English	7 years	105	70%
		11 years	45	30%
3	Majors	Information technology	60	40%
		Automation and Control Engineering technology	27	18%
		Accounting	30	20%
		Electronics	16	11%
		Business administration	17	11%

In addition, the researcher invited three experts in teaching English to take part in developing this English enrichment program. They have Ph.D. degree in Applied English linguistics and 16-year English teaching experience.

### **3.4. Research Instruments**

The questionnaire was used to collect the data from teachers and experts.

#### *The questionnaire for students*

The questionnaire had two parts: Part A and Part B and was developed to investigate students’ background information and three main objectives of this research. Part A included some general information about gender, time for learning English and majors. Part B consisted of 25 students’ attitudes, knowledge and English skills. Students’ attitudes towards this English enrichment programs included seven statements with the Cronbach Alpha of .940. In addition, the Cronbach Alpha of students’ English knowledge and skills were .854 and .867 respectively. The Cronbach Alpha of the whole questionnaire was .954, so the reliability of the questionnaire was high.

#### *The questionnaire for experts*

The interview was composed of 20 questionnaires which was divided into three parts:

Part 1: The objectives of English enrichment program. It included 5 statements about objectives and standards of the program.

Part 2: The contents of English enrichment program. It had 15 statements about the contents of the program.

Part 3: The instruction of evaluating under the standards of British Council. It consisted of 5 statements about the assessment standards of the program.

### **3.5. Data Collection Procedures**

To collect the data, the research was divided into two stages. Stage 1: Collecting the questionnaire for students. 200 questionnaires were delivered to students. It took students ten minutes to complete 25 statements. However, only 150 questionnaires were meaningfully collected. Stage 2: 20 questionnaires were directly sent to experts. The results were collected after one week.

In addition, the data were calculated by using SPSS 22.0 to find out the value of questionnaires.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **4.1. The Results of Students and Experts’ Attitudes Towards English Enrichment Program**

The table 2 demonstrated the students’ attitudes towards English enrichment program. It showed that students had positive attitudes (M=3.68; SD=.67). It could be concluded that students perceived the



importance of English enrichment program to meet the learning outcomes at the university. In addition, the results collected from experts' opinions showed that they complete agreed with the program and its usefulness (M=3.89; SD=.88). In general, both students and experts appreciated the necessary of the English enrichment program. They said that this program will help students reach the learning outcomes and improve students' English skills dramatically.

**Table2.** *Students and experts' attitudes towards English enrichment program*

Attitudes	Mean	SD
Students' attitudes towards English enrichment program under the assessment standards of APTIS certificate	3.68	.67
Experts' attitudes towards English enrichment program under the assessment standards of APTIS certificate	3.89	.88

**4.2. The Results of Students' and Experts' Educational Experiences**

The table 3 showed students' English knowledge and skills and experts' experiences in teaching English. Students agreed that their English knowledge and skills were above average (M=3.78 & 3.82; SD= .85 & .78). In addition, the experts showed that they also agreed the average English proficiency of students and said that students had difficulties to meet B1 level at the time of graduation (M=3.85; SD=.79). In a word, students had average English knowledge and skills. They needed to have good chances to improve their English proficiency. Furthermore, the experts realized the importance of designing an English enrichment programs for learners.

**Table3.** *Students and experts' education experiences*

Students and experts' educational experiences	Mean	SD
Students' English knowledge	3.78	.85
Students' English skills	3.82	.78
Experts' educational experiences	3.85	.79

**4.3. The Results of Students and Experts' Assessment Towards the Organization of Educational Experiences**

Most of students said that they did not have good learning experiences from English program at university (M=3.67 SD=.74). Students (85%) admitted that the contents of English programs at school did not help them to improve English. Besides that they said that the continuity of English programs at school could not help them to achieve B1 level, accounting for 87%. Moreover, the collected data from experts also showed that they had bad experiences in using the textbooks and assessment at the university (M=3.69; SD=.73). In a nutshell, both students and experts had negative experiences on English programs at university. It is a no doubt that developing an English enrichment programs with another assessment is really important.

**Table4.** *Students and experts' learning experiences*

Students and experts' learning experiences	Mean	SD
Students' learning experiences	3.67	.74
Experts' teaching experiences	3.69	.73

**4.4. The Results Experts' Assessment towards the Aims and Objectives at the University**

This part focused on the collected from experts. Two experts admitted that the assessment of university was not appropriate and difficult for students to achieve (M=3.89; SD=.74). They said that the evaluation needed to change, accounting for 87%. It might be concluded that the aims and objectives of English programs at school could not help students satisfy English learning outcomes at the university.

**Table5.** *Experts' evaluating towards the aims and objectives*

Experts' evaluating towards the aims and objectives	Mean	SD
Experts' evaluating towards the aims and objectives	3.67	.74

**5. DEVELOPING THE ENGLISH ENRICHMENT PROGRAM UNDER THE ASSESSMENT STANDARDS OF APTIS CERTIFICATE**

With the data explained in the part 4, the researcher suggested the English enrichment program which is expected to help students improve their English and skills and meet the learning outcomes at the university. The development of English enrichment program was based on Tyler's model.

Furthermore, designing this English enrichment programs are assumed to be able to:

- Ensure students' English proficiency to meet English requirement
- Assist teachers to designing lessons scientifically and effectively
- Help students improve English skills under the instruction of British Council
- *Determine the Aims and Objectives*

Based on the requirements of English enrichment programs under the assessment standards of APTIS certificate, the aims and objectives must be identified as follow:

The aims and objectives of the program are to help students improve their English to reach level B1 (APTIS certificate). The aims and objectives are demonstrated as follows:

**1) Attitudes:**

- Become interested in learning English, especially APTIS certificate of British Council
- Become familiar to international certificate

**2) Knowledge:**

- Recognize necessary vocabulary and structures to perform tasks in B1-level exam
- Reinforce English skills to satisfy the requirements of B1 certificate
- Reproduce the common questions in APTIS exam effectively
- Examine how APTIS exam is used to assess English proficiency

**3) Skills:**

- Become fluent in using English skills for daily situations
- Apply learned vocabulary and structures to complete tasks in APTIS exam
- Enhance computer skills through practicing APTIS tests

**4) Application of knowledge and skills**

- Practice problem solving skills for difficult exercises
- Adapt knowledge and skills in diverse situation
- Formulate the responsibility for own learning and collaborating with others
- *Identify and organize educational experiences*

**1) Learning process, teachers and learners**

- + The course has 6 modules (18 credits)
- + Teachers must have MA degree in English, pass APTIS exam with 160 marks at least
- + Learners have seven-year English learning

**2) Learning materials:**

- + Main course book: Richards, J. C & Bohlke, D. (2013). *Four Corners, First Edition, Level 1-6*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- + References: Richards, J. C. (2010). *Tactics for listening (Basic, Developing, Advanced)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**3) The contents of each level**

Based on the main course books, the contents of each level are demonstrated as follow:

**Table6.** *Contents of levels*

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Level 1	Students are able to understand and use common structures for introducing name, age, relatives; talking about favorites and hobbies, ...
Level 2	Students are able to use common structures and exchange information which is related to real-life conversations, ...
Level 3	Students are able to comprehend passages or talk about common topics such as jobs, school, entertainment ... In addition, they can write short paragraphs about daily activities and interested issues.
Level 4	Students are able to comprehend complex passages. In addition, they can fluently discuss common topics about jobs, environmental pollution, technology and well communicate with foreigners.
Level 5	Students can understand main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex sentences, different texts or broadcast related to their interests. The topics are job interviews, economics, governments, ...
Level 6	Students have no difficulties in understanding any kind of sentences, can produce clear and well-structured from understand and critically interpret understanding into real life. The topics will be well-organized and focused on cultures, social activities, business negotiations, ...

### 4) Learning and teaching facilities:

- + Learning facilities: Internet-connected computers
- + Teaching facilities: Internet-connected computers and projectors

### 5) Application of information technology

- + Each module has at least five sessions of practicing trial APTIS exam on computers

- *Evaluation of aims and objectives*

Students must take a final exam which is prepared by the British Council. Based on the guideline of scoring band, students must satisfy the score ranges as follows:

1) The first module

- + **A1 level:** The scores range from 1 – 40

2) The second module

- + **A1+ level:** The scores range from 41 – 60

3) The third module

- + **A2 level:** The scores range from 60 – 70

4) The fourth module

- + **A2+ level:** The scores range from 70 – 86

5) The fifth and six module

- + **B1 level:** The scores range from 86 – 133

In general, the development of English enrichment program for Vietnamese students under the assessment standards of APTIS certificate is based on the real needs of universities. This kind of program can be adjusted according to students' levels and universities' facilities.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to determine the effect of English enrichment program for Vietnamese students under the assessment standards of APTIS certificate. The current study found that students and experts had positive attitudes towards this kind of program ( $M=3.68$  &  $3.89$ ;  $SD=.67$  &  $.88$ ). It could be explained that they had been realizing the importance of English in real life. There were more than 92% participants who emphasized the necessity of enrichment programs for students. In addition, most of students who were from rural areas recognize their lack of English skills. What is more, two experts joining in this study had much experience in teaching English. As a result, it is obvious that they had positive attitudes towards the program. In relation to the assessment towards this program, it showed that experts realized the importance of English enrichment program ( $M=3.67$ ;  $SD=.74$ ). It could be concluded that the program under the assessment of APTIS is necessary to



evaluate students' English competence. Both experts appreciated the importance of APTIS certificate which is conducted by British Council.

In a word, English enrichment program under the assessment standards of APTIS certificate is a foundation to improve university students. Under the application of Tyler's model, the program will bring real benefits to learners. Although there are many programs which help learners to reach the requirements of English levels, the assessment will be an effective tool to have deep insights into students' English proficiency. This study still has some limitations. Considerably more work will need to be done to determine the effectiveness of each level under the standards of APTIS assessment.

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