Technology University Students’ Attitudes towards the English Graduation Benchmark (EGB): A Comparison between English-major and non-English Major Students

Hsuan-Yau (Tony) Lai 1,* and Jih-Fu Tu 2

1 Department of Applied Foreign Languages, College of Management, National Taipei University of Business, Taipei City 100, Taiwan
2 Department of Industrial Management and Business Administration, College of Business and Management, St. John’s University, New Taipei City 251, Taiwan; tu@mail.sju.edu.tw
* Correspondence: tony823@ntub.edu.tw

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Abstract: The English Graduation Benchmark (EGB) is a common criterion adopted by many universities in Taiwan, including both comprehensive and technology universities to monitor their graduates’ English ability. However, this common criterion has caused some debates in recent years about its appropriateness and fairness to students from less advantageous backgrounds. Some universities have decided to stop this policy in practice. This study aims to investigate technology university students’ perspectives and attitudes towards the EGB, as well as to compare and contrast the opinions of students from English and non-English departments. A quantitative method was adopted for this study. The questionnaire included: (1) Participants’ background information, (2) their experience of taking the proficiency tests, and (3) their thoughts on the EGB policy. In total, 360 students participated in this study. The results showed that most technology university students agreed with the establishment of the EGB. Students from English and non-English departments had positive attitudes because the benchmark motivated them to learn English in some way. Last but not least, technology university students considered the EGB to be useful for their future career development. This paper considers the possible implications of these findings for universities and the government, and suggests how they might re-conceptualize their policies to make them more sustainable.

Keywords: English Graduation Benchmark (EGB); attitudes; English majors; non-English majors; and career development

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education initiated the implementation of the English Graduation Benchmark (EGB) policy across the Taiwan universities in 2005 [1]. The main objective behind the widespread implementation of the policy was to encourage higher education students to pass the standardized tests and so prove their mastery of, and proficiency in, the English language. The rationale behind the policy is that the undertaking of the standardized tests aids in providing evidence of English competence. According to Wu & Lee [1], language assessment is necessary for gatekeeping functions in several different situations. In the same sense, Taiwan uses the tests as a means of enforcing the EGB policy sustainably. Furthermore, the tests are useful in the preparation of students for future employment as well as for advanced studies; they also sharpen the competitive edge of the graduates within the global environment. Since English is one of the most important international languages in today’s
world, learning English seems to have become a nationwide activity in Taiwan, which sees English as a foreign language. University graduates with a certain level of English proficiency (i.e., holding English proficiency test certificates) may have more opportunities to find a good job in a multinational or have a better salary. Company employees and civil servants at government institutions have also been encouraged to pass public English proficiency tests to be promoted or earn a higher salary. There is a more profound rationale behind this social pressure. Taiwan, with a population of 23 million, is not recognized as an independent country by the United Nations (UN), nor by most countries in the world, and faces enormous pressure and constant threats from China, which views Taiwan as part of the People’s Republic of China. The only solution to this difficult situation is to connect Taiwan to the world via its development of high technology (e.g., semiconductors) and international trade. English seems to play a crucial role in achieving that goal. Therefore, the government has not only extended the English education to Grade 3 at elementary school in 2001, but also plans to introduce bilingual education (teaching various school subjects in English) by 2030 [1]. Eliassen and Rich [1] even argue that English can enhance connections between Taiwan and English-speaking countries, and further foster Taiwan’s move away from the view of many people that Taiwan is part of China. However, they [1] are also concerned that this movement may deepen the inequity between students from advantageous and less advantageous socio-economic backgrounds, as well as between urban and rural areas. Indeed, learning English has long been considered a privilege in Taiwan (and perhaps in other countries where English is learned as a foreign language). Students from a middle- or high-income family can easily access abundant resources and/or go to cram schools (private institutes) for extra English lessons and tutoring after school. By contrast, students from a lower-income family or from the indigenous tribes have to struggle with their daily lives, not to mention any extra English tutoring. Tavernise [2] also argues that wealthy parents tend to invest more time and money on their children, which widens the education gap between students from a high-income family and a lower-income family. In Taiwan, this education gap also exists between students in urban and rural areas and students from families of different income brackets in terms of English learning. Due to this, although the EGB policy initiated by the government seems to be aimed at raising university graduates’ English proficiency in general for their own and Taiwan’s competitiveness, is it fair to students from less advantageous backgrounds with limited resources and financial support? Do university students from different backgrounds agree with the establishment of the policy?

Presently, more than ninety percent of the higher learning institutions, including both technology (practice-oriented) and comprehensive universities (research-oriented), in Taiwan have implemented the EGB policy, but there is great variation in benchmark standards set across the respective institutions [3]. The result has been that the students from the respective universities display varying standards of competence, mastery, and proficiency in English, and this has created additional challenges for the Ministry of Education in maintaining a uniform standard for English proficiency. Nonetheless, the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has helped considerably in fulfilling this objective of uniformity, since it provides the institutions with a reference point for the levels of English and for assessment standards [4]. The framework is subdivided into six different levels from low to high competence, including A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2, in that order [3]. The higher learning institutions require that the students pass examinations that are equivalent to the CEFR B1 level before graduating, while the higher-rated universities set a higher standard of the equivalent of CEFR B2 level for graduation. National Taiwan University set the standard at CEFR C2 for English majors [5]. Overall, the higher institutions have conformed to the Ministry of Education’s policy regarding the English benchmark policy.

Establishing the EGB policy has led to a public discourse among the scholars and linguists in Taiwan who have been keen to ascertain the effectiveness of the implementation of the policy [3]. A wide range of studies, including those of Chen and Liu [6], Min [7], and Kim [8], have examined the students’ learning motivation and their perceptions regarding the standardization tests prior to, and following, the deployment of the EGB policy. The general finding in the studies is that the policy...
has been pivotal in the development of positive attitudes and acceptability regarding the learning of English. The results in the survey conducted by Chen and Liu [6] indicated that more than fifty percent of the students had a positive attitude towards learning the English language. The results show that the standardized assessments have helped to improve the motivation of the students to gain proficiency in the English language. This assertion is strengthened by the findings in the research by Huang [9], which revealed that anxiety towards the implementation of the benchmark policy is low. In contrast, it showed that students in higher learning institutions that were not under the policy had greater anxiety in comparison to the students whose institutions required them to pass the English benchmark tests before graduation [9]. Lai [10] also claimed that exams (or tests) might not be a demotivating factor for students in the English language classroom. According to his research on university students’ (61 English majors) demotivating factors in Taiwan, he found that although some participants indicated that their English learning motivation was negatively affected by exams (or tests), others had a positive opinion about exams, stating that participants benefited from taking tests regularly to make progress.

Based on a randomized control trial completed by Su [11] that examined 618 students from technological institutes of higher learning regarding their attitudes towards the English benchmark policy, a majority of students generally accepted it as a useful and career-advancing policy; 55% of the respondents showed support for the policy in comparison to the 43.3% who did not support the policy. It was also noted that in comparison to the non-English-major students, English majors had a greater proclivity towards the implementation of the English benchmark policy with 73.2% of them citing that it was advantageous to them, both in their highly competitive future employment and also in their advanced studies’ admission [11]. The other reasons cited for the support of the policy include the fact that it facilitates the improvement of the students’ English proficiency; moreover, some of the respondents argued that the English benchmark policy enhanced the competitiveness of the Taiwan higher learning institutions on a global scale. In addition, the policy serves to increase the opportunities for Taiwanese students to advance their studies in foreign countries, such as the UK and US, that take into consideration the English proficiency level of the students [3]. However, some of the students tended to oppose the implementation of the policy on the basis of their unfamiliarity with the English tests administered to them. Some students also highlighted the fact that they lacked the confidence to pass the examinations. With respect to student attitudes, 58.4% of the learners approved of the dispensation of elementary level tests, 26.8% approved of intermediate level examinations, but only 4.7% approved of the high-intermediate level examinations [11]. Su, in her study, recommended the continued implementation of the English benchmark policy, and favored the encouragement of the students to undertake the English standardized tests, rather than compelling them to do so. Additionally, she emphasized the need to provide software and hardware facilities to complement the learning process, thus enabling the students to improve their proficiency based on a more flexible approach, rather than on the rigid traditional classroom lessons [11].

Su’s [11] research was used as a basis for the study facilitated by Chen and Squires [12], which investigated the perceptions of the effectiveness of the English benchmark policy among professionals. Forty-two percent of the respondents agreed that the policy was generally effective, while 30.8% of them disapproved of the implementation of the policy. The positive attitude of the professionals towards the implementation of the policy was due to the perception that it helped to improve the English language proficiency level of the students. Furthermore, the increased competence in English was important in helping the students gain a competitive edge in their future careers and in providing them with options to facilitate the advancement of their studies. Some of the experts, however, were opposed to the widespread implementation of the policy because of the perception that there were different motivations behind its increased implementation. To begin with, the EGB policy reduced the probability of students passing their examinations, resulting in the students having to pay more fees to retake their examinations.
The opposition is mostly due to the high rates of the examination fees. The fact that these externally administered proficiency tests are costly has led to greater resistance by the public. However, if students do not take external proficiency exams, they can still take internal proficiency exams. In addition, the internal examinations have also been subject to opposition because of the perception by some of a conspiracy with the testing organizations having students undertake the examinations more than once by failing them in order to generate more income [12]. It frequently happens that university authorities have close ties with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and other testing organizations. These organizations hold proficiency tests (internal exams) on campuses especially for the students. Some students have doubts about this kind of cooperation because they believe that the university authorities have received some commission from the testing organization. As a solution to this negative perception, Chen and Squires [12] recommended the integration of performance assessments as well as portfolio evaluations instead of the standardized assessments. The study also recommended the integration of comprehensive preparation measures, including the provision of supporting materials to enable the students to prepare adequately for the examinations.

The tests have also been associated with negative effects on student graduation [13]; the failure of these English proficiency tests leads to delayed graduation. It is recommended that in the event that students fail these tests in the course of their studies, they should be allowed to undertake make-up courses in the final year to prevent graduation delays [13]. If they pass these courses, they can still graduate on time; this also causes some controversy because some students choose not to take any external and internal tests, and sign up for the make-up courses directly instead so that they can graduate on time.

Chu’s [14] comprehensive research on the washback effects and the stakes of the EGB, as well as possible mediating factors at two technology universities in Taiwan by adopting both qualitative and quantitative approaches (data from various sources such as interviewing teachers, students, administrative staff, and employers, classroom observation, materials, and questionnaires distributed to teachers and students) also showed that the washback effects of the EGB on the teachers and students were low and negative. The results even further indicated that the EGB in fact did not meet the students’ practical needs, which mainly caused the low washback effects. As well as these factors, Chu [14] also pointed out that the stakeholders in the study had various opinions about the EGB, which reflected on the debates discussed above, that society has different perceptions towards the EGB policy.

The prevalence of the trend towards internationalization of higher education has led to the implementation of English benchmark requirements for graduation that essentially necessitates the illustration of a good command of the English language by the students based on a particular Common European Framework of Reference for Languages by undertaking the standardized tests in the English language, such as the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) [1]. This trend has been subject to heavy criticism because of the failure of the policy to achieve its fundamental goals of improving the English language proficiency of the students and enhancing their career prospects. The language scholars, however, agree that this disparity between objectives and results related to the creation of the EGB for graduation has created a sense of urgency in terms of the necessity of exploring the consequences of applying the standardized tests to consolidate the policy. This literature review is a reflection of the general findings from the research, conducted by a wide range of scholars who focused on the challenges presented. Unlike most of the preceding studies, this research focuses on the differences in perceptions between the English and non-English major students at technology universities (practice-oriented) with regard to the English proficiency tests. Since English majors tend to have higher motivation to study English compared to non-English majors, we would like to explore whether these two groups of students have different perceptions of the EGB. The research questions are as follows:
(1) Do students from technology universities (practice-oriented) agree with the establishment of the EGB?

(2) Do English and non-English majors at technology universities have different perceptions of the EGB policy?

(3) Is the EGB useful for technology university students’ future career development?

2. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design, which enabled us to use actual data from the field to evaluate the research questions. This study was scheduled to be conducted between March 2019 and June 2019. The data were collected using web-based questionnaires, which were distributed to technology university students in Taiwan using snowball sampling. The questionnaires were standard for all the study participants. A web-based questionnaire was convenient for this study as it enabled the quick implementation of the survey and ensured the respondents’ identity anonymity. Additionally, it made the survey process easy, considering that the respondents were widely distributed throughout Taiwan [14]. The link to the survey was circulated among various online student chat rooms and other social media platforms with the help of students. We also asked teachers to distribute the link to the survey in classrooms during lectures. The distribution mechanisms allowed us to reach out to many students, thus enabling us to increase participation and reach the requisite number of participants to facilitate the study.

The questionnaire items were mainly borrowed from Chu [14] and other relevant sources (Huang [9], Huang [15], Su [11]) to avoid vagueness and lack of clarity, and were modified to meet the needs of the study. There were three Sections in Chu’s [14] original questionnaire for the participating students. The first Section (Background information) included ten questions (e.g., gender, year at school, major, years studying English, self-assessed English level, awareness of the EGB policy at school, whether the respondent has passed the EGB, when and how did the respondent pass it). The second Section consisted of two sub-sections. Section 1 (15 Likert-scale items) aimed to explore the respondent’s English learning strategies outside classes, such as listening to English songs, memorizing vocabulary items, studying grammar, using online tools, and/or doing mock tests. Section 2 was designed to probe the respondents’ opinions about the EGB (7 Likert-scale items) including their motivation, fear, frustration, and effort. The third Section (5 Likert-scale items) mainly dealt with the respondents’ thoughts on the local public test (GEPT) and international proficiency tests such as TOEFL, TOEIC, and IELTS.

Although Chu’s [14] questionnaire for students provided a solid foundation for our research, we still felt some of the items in it were not well suited for our context, and decided to remove them and modified other items, especially in Sections 2 and 3, to meet our needs. For instance, Chu [14] probed into the participating students’ background information and English learning strategies outside the English classroom, but put less emphasis on their perspectives on the EGB policy. In our case, we would like to put the focus more on the participating students’ attitudes toward the policy since it has caused a lot of debate and discussion. As well as this, Chu [14] did not investigate the participating students’ proficiency test scores (e.g., TOEIC or GEPT) but asked for their opinions about the local (GEPT) and international (TOEIC, TOEFL, and IELTS) proficiency tests in the third Section of her questionnaire. In our questionnaire, we decided to examine the students’ proficiency test scores (if they had taken the test) and probed their thoughts on the tests.

The questionnaire included three major Sections: (1) Background information (majors; English proficiency), (2) experience of taking the proficiency tests (six items), including the respondents’ experience of taking the TOEIC or GEPT, their understanding of the EGB policy at their respective schools, and how they prepared for it, and (3) thoughts on the EGB policy (13 items), including whether they were in favor of the policy, their motivation, frustration, pressure, way of learning, their perceptions of the impact of the EGB on their future career development, and their attitudes towards the local (GEPT) and international (TOEIC, TOEFL, and IELTS) proficiency tests. All items (21 items) were
In total, three hundred and sixty students (N = 360) responded to the questionnaire. The participants were divided into two groups: English-majors (N = 160) and non-English majors (N = 200). The students’ general level of English ability was also self-assessed (Figure 1).

3. Results

3.1. Background Information (Two Items)

In total, three hundred and sixty students (N = 360) responded to the questionnaire. The participants were divided into two groups: English-majors (N = 160) and non-English majors (N = 200). The students’ general level of English ability was also self-assessed (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Participants’ general level of English ability (self-assessed).](image)

It was predictable that the English majors tended to believe they had a good grasp of English. For the English majors, 39% thought their ability was good, and 46% believed they were slightly above average. Comparatively, none of the non-English major students believed they were very good in the language; 15% stated they were good, 37% categorized themselves as slightly above average, 30% stated they were below average, 12% as poor, and 6% as very poor.

3.2. Experience of Taking the Proficiency Tests (Six Items)

When asked if the respondents had ever taken proficiency tests, such as the GEPT or the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), 91% within the English major group (N = 160) had taken the GEPT (Figure 2). Within the group, only 24% had taken the elementary level test (equivalent to CEFR A2), 53% had taken the intermediate level test (CEFR B1), and 14% had taken the high intermediate level test (CEFR B2). For the non-English majors (N = 200), 63% had taken the test. Out of the group that had taken the test, 36% were at the elementary level (CEFR A2), 21% at the intermediate level (CEFR B1), 5% at the high intermediate level (CEFR B2).

With respect to the TOEIC (Figure 3), 94% of the English major students (N = 160) had taken the test, while 70% of the non-English majors had done the test. The TOEIC certificates exist in five different colors representing the test-taker’s proficiency level: Gold (860–990); blue (730–855); green (470–725); brown (220–465); orange (10–215). Most Taiwanese test-takers aim at achieving the gold certificate to gain more competitiveness and a sense of superiority. In this study, for the English majors, the biggest
The segment was clustered around the scores of 730–855 (blue) and 470–725 (green), accounting for 40% and 28%, respectively (The full score for the TOEIC is 990). Another 23% scored between 860–990 (gold), and the smallest group scored between 220–465 marks (brown). The non-English majors (N = 200) also had a mid-range clustering with 28% scoring between 470 and 725 (green), 25% scoring 220–465 (brown), 4% scoring 10–215 (orange), and 3% scoring 860–990 (gold).

Figure 2. Levels of respondents who took the GEPT (English: N = 160; Non-English: N = 200).

Figure 3. Levels of respondents who took the TOEIC (English: N = 160; Non-English: N = 200).

When further asked if the students understood the EGB at their respective universities, almost all of the students claimed to have a good understanding of the policy (English majors—98%; non-English majors—95%). Despite that, a significant number of them did not actively prepare for the EGB tests (Figure 4), opting instead to take them in their stride (English majors—67%; non-English majors—73%). This may have been because there are various complementary measures (e.g., proficiency tests held on campus or the provision of make-up courses) to ensure that the students can graduate on time. As a result, most of the participants did not pass their EGB when the study was conducted, including those set up by complementary measures, with the proportion falling to 57% (English majors) and 66% (non-English majors), respectively (Figure 5).
For the English majors who passed the EGB, 86% passed through an external test (a public test), while only 9% passed via a proficiency test held on campus (internal test), and another 5% passed via make-up courses. For the non-English majors, 56% passed as a result of external testing, 27% passed proficiency tests held on campus, and 17% had to undertake make-up courses (Figure 6). We can see that both English majors and non-English majors in the study seemed to prefer the public test to the other methods.

Figure 4. How the students dealt with the EGB (English: N = 160; Non-English: N = 200).

Figure 5. Respondents who did not pass the EGB (English: N = 160; Non-English: N = 200).

For the English majors who passed the EGB, 86% passed through an external test (a public test), while only 9% passed via a proficiency test held on campus (internal test), and another 5% passed via make-up courses. For the non-English majors, 56% passed as a result of external testing, 27% passed proficiency tests held on campus, and 17% had to undertake make-up courses (Figure 6). We can see that both English majors and non-English majors in the study seemed to prefer the public test to the other methods.

Figure 6. How the respondents passed the EGB (English: N = 160; Non-English: N = 200).
3.3. Thoughts on the EGB Policy (13 Items)

As discussed above, the establishing of the EGB policy has caused some controversy in Taiwan, and some universities have even lifted the policy as requested by their students. However, what did the students from technology universities in the present study think of the policy? Interestingly, when asked if technology universities in Taiwan should establish the EGB, most English majors and non-English majors agreed with the idea with high percentages (Figure 7).

![Figure 7. Participants’ opinions about the necessity of establishing the EGB (English: N = 160; Non-English: N = 200)](image)

When further probed about motivation, pressure, learning efficiency, preparation, way of learning, and learning approaches on a Likert scale from one to six (1 = Completely disagree; 2 = Strongly disagree; 3 = Slightly disagree; 4 = Slightly agree; 5 = Strongly agree; 6 = Completely agree). Mean values and T-test values (majors) were to see if there were significant differences between English and non-English majors. As Table 1 shows, in terms of motivation, pressure, learning efficiency, and preparation in fixed time, there were significant differences between English and non-English majors (p < 0.05). English majors (M = 3.93, SD = 1.33) tended to feel motivated in learning English for the test, compared with non-majors (M = 3.58, SD = 1.41), t(358) = 2.493, p = 0.015. That also reflects that non-majors (M = 3.68, SD = 1.49) were under more pressure when facing the EGB than English majors (M = 3.34, SD = 1.41), t(358) = -2.138, p = 0.033. English majors also showed considerable control over their learning efficiency (M = 4.64, SD = 0.96) and could prepare for the test within a fixed time (M = 4.01, SD = 1.25), which was significantly different from non-majors regarding their learning efficiency (M = 3.38, SD = 1.24), t(357) = 6.957, p = 0.000, and preparation within a fixed time (M = 3.62, SD = 1.32), t(358) = 2.856, p = 0.005. However, when asked if the respondents had changed their way of learning English and forced themselves to study harder with various approaches, there was no significant difference between these two groups. We can refer back to Figure 4 that most of the students in the study actually did not prepare for the test actively, but let it happen naturally.

In order to explore the respondents’ deeper thoughts on the establishment of the EGB, the questionnaire asked them from both positive and negative perspectives (Table 2). Both groups (English and non-English majors) tended to believe that the EGB was a good thing and was helpful for them to find a job/pursue further studies after graduation. However, the T-test results showed significant difference between English majors and non-English majors regarding the future development (p < 0.05). English majors (M = 4.34, SD = 1.26) were strongly inclined to believe that the EGB was useful for their future development, compared with non-English majors (M = 3.91, SD = 1.39), t(358) = 3.053, p = 0.002. If we asked the participants in reverse (the EGB was too idealistic and not practically helpful), most of them had a negative response to these statements. In other words, they did not think the EGB was too idealistic to achieve and was not practically helpful.
Table 1. T-test results-1 (majors) (* significant difference at the 5% level).

|                             | English Majors         | Non-English Majors          |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| EGB motivated me to learn English * | $(M = 3.93, SD = 1.33)$ | $(M = 3.58, SD = 1.41)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = 2.493$, $p = 0.015$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| EGB induced pressure about English learning for me * | $(M = 3.34, SD = 1.41)$ | $(M = 3.68, SD = 1.49)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = -2.138$, $p = 0.033$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| I can control my learning efficiency * | $(M = 4.64, SD = 0.96)$ | $(M = 3.83, SD = 1.24)$     |
|                             | $t (357) = 6.957$, $p = 0.000$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| I prepare for the test in fixed time * | $(M = 4.01, SD = 1.25)$ | $(M = 3.62, SD = 1.32)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = 2.856$, $p = 0.005$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| To pass the EGB, I changed my way of learning | $(M = 3.86, SD = 1.24)$ | $(M = 3.74, SD = 1.28)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = 0.901$, $p = 0.368$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| I forced myself to study harder with various approaches | $(M = 4.00, SD = 1.31)$ | $(M = 3.87, SD = 1.32)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = 0.963$, $p = 0.336$ (two-tailed) |                         |

Table 2. T-test results-2 (majors) (* significant difference at the 5% level).

|                             | English Majors         | Non-English Majors          |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Establishing the EGB is a good thing | $(M = 4.33, SD = 1.24)$ | $(M = 4.09, SD = 1.52)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = 1.618$, $p = 0.107$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| EGB is helpful in finding a job/pursuing further studies * | $(M = 4.34, SD = 1.26)$ | $(M = 3.91, SD = 1.39)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = 3.053$, $p = 0.002$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| EGB is too idealistic | $(M = 3.29, SD = 1.28)$ | $(M = 3.46, SD = 1.37)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = -1.175$, $p = 0.241$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| EGB is not practically helpful | $(M = 3.08, SD = 1.35)$ | $(M = 3.30, SD = 1.43)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = -1.475$, $p = 0.141$ (two-tailed) |                         |

In Taiwan, since there are various English proficiency tests, at the end of the questionnaire, we explored whether these university students had any preferences when referring to the locally-developed GEPT or internationally-credible tests such as TOEFL, TOEIC, or IELTS (Table 3). The results showed that most of the respondents seemed to trust international tests over the local one. When further comparing both English and non-majors’ perceptions of the international proficiency tests (T-test result), we discovered that the English majors (M = 4.80, SD = 1.09) strongly believed in these international tests, compared with non-majors (M = 4.49, SD = 1.22), $t (358) = 2.499$, $p = 0.013$. We can assume that the students prefer international certificates so that they can have a competitive edge in finding a good job/pursuing further studies and/or competing with other non-native-English speakers in this global village.

Table 3. T-test results-3 (majors) (* significant difference at the 5% level).

|                             | English Majors         | Non-English Majors          |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| GEPT is a credible test | $(M = 3.22, SD = 1.44)$ | $(M = 3.12, SD = 1.37)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = 0.677$, $p = 0.499$ (two-tailed) |                         |
| TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS are credible tests * | $(M = 4.80, SD = 1.09)$ | $(M = 4.49, SD = 1.22)$     |
|                             | $t (358) = 2.499$, $p = 0.013$ (two-tailed) |                         |
4. Discussion

According to the UN’s Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [16], all nations should try to eliminate inequality in education and ensure all students acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development. As a developing country that relies heavily on international trade and high technology, the Taiwanese government is eager to achieve a recognized status in the world and puts a focus on university students’ English ability; hence, the EGB policy has been in practice since 2005 in order to improve university graduates’ English and increase their competitiveness. Although the government and some universities might hope this policy can continue sustainably, it has recently caused debate and discussion about its appropriateness and fairness to students from lower-income families. In this present study, we examined three research themes/questions including technology university students’ thoughts on the policy, whether students’ major plays a role in their perceptions, and if the policy is helpful for students’ future career development. Although Chu’s [14] research results showed negative washback effects of the EGB on the teachers and students and that the EGB did not fulfill the participating students’ needs, this study’s results in fact suggested that technology university students, including both English and non-English majors, were uniformly in favor of the establishment of the EGB and believed it would help their future career development. These findings echo some other researchers’ (for example, Wu and Lee [3]; Chen and Liu [6]; Min [7]; Kim [8]) results, as discussed above. Most people may see tests as a demotivating factor for foreign language learners and standardized tests might be unfair to students from less advantageous backgrounds, yet most of the students in the present study seemed to regard the EGB as a motivation for them to study English harder. As Harmer [17] and Lai [10] claim, testing may not be entirely a negative force for learners; instead, as a positive drive, it can push English language learners to achieve more. Furthermore, there may also be a unique exam culture. Chen, Warden, and Chang [18] investigated 567 Taiwanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners’ motivation orientation, expectancy, and self-evaluated skills. According to their research findings, a new motivation orientation, ‘required orientation’, was identified and strongly correlates with Taiwanese English learners’ past and future expectations, and one that has long existed in Chinese culture. Required orientation refers to passing various examinations, such as entrance examinations, required classes, elective classes, and job examinations. In Chinese culture, this required orientation plays a crucial role, since traditionally it is believed that passing examinations is the only way to enter a good school/university, have a good job, and a good life. The prerequisite for these goals is to bear the pressure and pass the examinations successfully. Due to this, students from less advantageous families might regard the EGB (standardized tests) as a positive measure to change their life for the better and not an inequitable treatment. Particularly, in this study, the English majors tended to feel that the EGB motivated them to study English harder, which also reflects Wu and Lee’s [3] research findings. In their study investigating Taiwanese university students’ perceptions of learning motivation, test value, and test anxiety towards the EGB, they discovered that the high-intermediate students had intrinsic motivation of studying English for the EGB, but the intermediate group was mainly driven by extrinsic motivation. They also suggested that the high-intermediate group felt less stressed when facing the EGB, which can also be referred back to our study results that the English majors were not under pressure, and could control their learning efficiency and prepare for the test in fixed time. However, generally speaking, the EGB had a positive impact on our participating students, including both English majors and non-English majors. This drive might influence them to aim high at external proficiency tests (public tests) instead of internal tests or passing the make-up course. Accordingly, in order to increase their competitiveness in this highly mobile global village, most respondents preferred international certificates (e.g., TOEFL, TOEIC, and IELTS) to the local one (GEPT), which is understandable.

Undoubtedly, there are a couple of limitations of the study. First, since snowball sampling was adopted to collect the data, the sample size might not be representative of all technology university students in Taiwan. However, with the help of many teachers and students, the questionnaire link...
was distributed to as many students as possible. Three hundred and sixty respondents (N = 360) still shed some light on this controversial issue. Second, students’ perceptions and/or thoughts are hard to quantify since everybody’s cognition is different and unique. Some insightful information might be missing from this study. However, the findings still play a useful preliminary role for future research, which can probe these university students’ thoughts further by adopting a qualitative or mixed-methods approach.

5. Conclusions

Despite all the debates and discussions about the establishment of the EGB in recent years in Taiwan, the findings of the present study suggest that technology university students support the idea of having the benchmark since it provides motivation for them to study English more diligently and increases their competitiveness. Although some universities (especially comprehensive universities) in Taiwan have lifted the policy due to student requests, the results of the present research actually suggest that the benchmark policy seems essential to technology university students. However, as one of the authors has observed as an English language teacher at a technology university for more than ten years, it is important for the government and/or the university authorities to offer various approaches to help students pass the benchmark as Wu and Lee [3] and Su [11] suggest. Holding proficiency tests on campus and providing make-up courses are the basic procedures. Besides these, offering incentives (rewards or redeeming test fees) for students who pass the benchmark (especially those from lower-income families) is another approach that would increase the students’ motivation to study English more thoroughly. All in all, sustaining the EGB policy either at the national or university level is crucial to improving university students’ understanding and the use of the English language, and to provide opportunities for students from less advantageous backgrounds for better job prospects and lives in the future.

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