



Exploring Of Students' Difficulties In Reading Section Of Toefl

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ABSTRACT

This research discussed the difficulties in reading section of TOEFL test by the students. This research used qualitative method with a thematic analysis approach. The instrumental of this research was EFL students learning outcomes and Interview. This research was carried out at Universities Muslim Nusantara Muslim Al-Washliyah Medan. The subject of this research there were 3 semester 8 students chosen as the participants of the research. The criteria as follows 1 student with higher TOEFL score, 1 student with moderate TOEFL score, and 1 student with lower TOEFL score. The result of research was found namely; vocabulary, fluency, and reasoning and background knowledge. That there are themes namely kinds of vocabulary; reading speed and background knowledge the students need to repeat reading the text for more than 5 times in order to find out the meaning for the unfamiliar vocabulary. The spesific vocabulary such as : science, health and nature phenomena. In this care the students with lower TOEFL score found that lack background knowledge make them being slower in reading the text

Keyword

EFL Students', Reading Difficult, TOEFL

INTRODUCTION

TOEFL stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language. It is a standardized academic English test primarily taken by students applying to universities in the United States. The TOEFL is also accepted as proof of English skill by some universities outside the United States. More than seven thousand colleges and universities in one hundred and thirty countries, including the best universities in the world, such as the U.S., Canada, UK, Australia, and New Zealand. This test is not only used to register at the university but is also required if want to work in government agencies, take care of licensing, companies, and also for scholarship registration.

Setiawan (2013) states that in many nations, TOEFL was used as a criterion for university admission or for obtaining a scholarship. Several Indonesian universities need the TOEFL examination as part of their graduation criteria (Soali & Pujiani, 2020). TOEFL also becomes one of the standard requirements to enter Indonesian universities (Rahmah, 2019). There are various reasons underlying students difficulties in succeeding in the TOEFL test. Mahmud (2014) suggests that one factor causing students to

struggle to deal with the TOEFL test is the various skills that are evaluated simultaneously at the same test. One solution for this is to have fruitful strategies for each respective skill.

The score of reading section in TOEFL test will influence the final score of TOEFL test. In other words, it can be said that having good comprehension of reading skills which are tested in reading section of TOEFL test is necessary in order to achieve good TOEFL score. However, reading is one of student's problems in the test. Reading is a complex process of human functions which need long process. Reading is the complexity of the process makes reading in foreign language, as a difficult activity. According to Tomi (2017) reading comprehension is the most important section among three language skills tested in the TOEFL. At the same time, that section is also the most difficult according to the 6th semester english department in University Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Nusantara Medan.

English students are students who study in English education program. Looking at their background, they should have a big chance to have better TOEFL score and a big chance to again the benefits of having good TOEFL scores. It is because they have learned much about English skills during their study. Furthermore, there are a lot of English students who state that they are still afraid of taking TOEFL test because reading sections were considered as difficult.

Based on experince of the researcher it was in 6th semester students in University Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan considered that reading section of TOEFL test is extremely difficult. Students claim that the students faced some problems regarding the unfamiliarity of the topic discussed in the texts. Based on the statement above, it can be concluded that reading comprehension something difficult and the students lack knowledge and unfamiliar with the strategy in reading section. Therefore, the researcher interest to research entitle "Exploring the Diffulties Students' in Reading Section of TOEFL Test".

TOEFL test or Test of English as a Foreign Language is the most widely respect English Language test in the world, recognized by more than 10,000 colleges, universities and agencies in more than 130 countries. Wherever you want to study, the TOEFL test can help you get there. TOEFL is designed to measure the English language proficiency of people whose native language is not English. TOEFL scores are accepted by more than 7,500 colleges, universities, and licensing agencies in over 130 countries (ETS 2009). The test is also used by government, scholarship and exchange programs worldwide. Meanwhile Isaac & Justin (2009) say that TOEFL is the only application matric

common to international applications from a wide variety of academic backgrounds, these test result are sometimes used beyond their intended scope to predict student academic success Indonesian higher education institutions, like their fellow Southeast Asian countries, have started to seriously introduce English proficiency tests. As a country in which English served as a foreign language (EFL), the use of English proficiency test, especially TOEFL, have been very popular amongst students and lecturers. These uses are various, ranging from TOEFL matriculation program (Herwandar, Safryono, & Haryono, 2012; Noviyenty, 2018), TOEFL preparation class (Masfufah, 2018), TOEFL school in online learning platform (Nimasari, Mufanti, & Gestanti, 2019), and graduation requirement (Aziz, 2016). Given this massive use of TOEFL, the teaching and learning process, the syllabus construction, and the curriculum design are greatly influenced by the need to improve students' TOEFL scores.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research conducted by employing the qualitative research method with a thematic analysis approach. The design of this study classify as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Thematic analysis is useful for summarizing key features of large data set, as it force the researcher to take a well-structure approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organize final report (King, 2004).

A further advantage, particularly from perspective of learning and teaching, that is a method rather than methodology (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clake & Braund, 2013). The mean that unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tie to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective. This is a flexible method, a considerable advantage give the diveristy of work in learning. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes i.e patterns in the data that important or interesting and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interpret and made sense of it. A sommon pitfall is use the main interview questions as the themes (Clarce & Braun 2013). Typically, this reflect the fact that the data will summarize and organize, rather than analysis. In this case, the researcher analysis the data by interviewed ELF students at University Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan about the difficulties in Reading Section of TOEFL.

The instrument of collecting data used by the researcher to get the databy using EFL students' outcomes, observation and interview. The explanation as follows:

1. EFL Students' Learning Outcomes

In conducted this research, the researcher used EFL Students' Learning Outcomes as the instrument of collecting data. EFL Students learning outcomes will gather by asking EFL lecture's willingness to give the information

2. Interview

The researcher given some questions to know the difficulties of students faced the TOEFL Test in Reading Section and the potential strategies of students to get a higher score or to increase their score. The researcher used 3 students who got the high score, the moderate score and low score measure. The researcher applied semi-structure interviews which allow the researcher to add additional question or follow up question based on the participant responses.

This study in collecting the data for this research, the researcher did interview to obtain the data in order to answer the research problems. For more explanation, the procedures are discussed as follows:

1. The researcher asked permission to the English Department Unit to request the data of the English students who follow the TOEFL and asked permission to retrieve data to search for which skills were answered incorrectly in TOEFL. Then the researcher used the documentation as another supporting material to make this research more accurate. The researcher collected all supporting documents from written interviews with participants, drawings and other important documents during the study.

After getting the data from English Department Unit the researcher interviewed the English students to find out their reasons for their difficulties toward TOEFL in Reading Section and strategy to face TOEFL Test in Reading Section. Through this interview the researcher could know data about the difficulties faced by the student in more actual and valid. The researcher used unstructured interview which was free interview where researcher does not use interview guidelines that have been arranged in a systematic and complete for data collection. The purpose of this type of interview was to find the problem more openly and the interviewee asked for his opinion. Unstructured interviews were more flexible because questions could be adapted and change depending on the participant's answer, also this interview produces qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions. This allows respondents to speak in depth, choose their own words. This helped the researcher develop a real understanding of one's understanding of a situation. In conducting the

interview, the researcher needs to listen carefully and record what the participant say.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to analyze EFL students' perception in difficulties of TOEFL in Reading Section at University of Muslim Nusantara. There were three students chosen as subjects of the research, namely : AR, LL, and PAY. All data found was completely discussed in this chapter. In order to analyze the data, the researcher used ELF students' outcomes and interview question sheets.

The researcher used ELF students' learning outcomes as a technique for defining the subject of this research. The researcher got ELF students' learning outcomes from their statement in interview because they have the sertificated of TOEFL when they were doing the test TOEFL. In details it is clearly presented in table :

No	Participant	Gende r	Sem	TOEFL Score	English Level
1.	LL	F	8th	525	Higher
2	PAY	F	8th	420	Moderate
3	AR	M	8th	335	Lower

EFL students learning outcomes were divided into three categories namely EFL students with higher English TOEFL score, EFL students with moderate English

TOEFL score and EFL students with lower English TOEFL score, each category consisted of one students. The English TOEFL score of LL was 525. She hold the higher English TOEFL level category. Moreover, the English TOEFL score of PAY was 420. She made the position on the moderate English TOEFL level category. Futhermore, the English score of AR was 335. He was in the lower English TOEFL level category.

The interview was taken in 3 days which from 23, 24, 25 May 2022. The participants in this interview 3 EFL students at Univesity of Muslim Nusantara Medan in which one students from the higher English TOEFL skills category namely LL. Then, one students from moderate English TOEFL skill category namely PAY. Also one students from lower English TOEFL skills category namely AR. One participants would interviewed for one day and it would finish on the third day. The interview was devided in three themes namely; lack of vocabulary, reading speed and background knowledge.

The difficulties of reading can be caused by less motivation given by teacher or parents at home. To understand what stated in text, people need to understand most of the words in the text. Having a strong vocabulary is a key component of reading comprehension. Students can learn vocabulary through instruction but they typically learn the meaning of words through everyday experience and also by reading. (Lee:2017) If the students have limited of vocabulary in their memoriez that make the students will difficult to answer of the English test. The highlight of the result of interview elaborated in **Data I**
Question: "What do you find difficult word in reading text when doing the Test TOEFL?"

LL: "Word like science, that is heavy and difficult to memorize for me"

It can be concluded that, when doing on the TOEFL test questions, it is not uncommon for students to have difficulties in understanding vocabulary but not all types of vocabulary that cannot be understood only a few types. For example, LL has a high score when faced the TOEFL test, but she also finds it difficult to understand types of vocabulary such as science as he stated "*Words like science heavy and difficult to memorize for me*".

Data II

In Data II, PAY found the difficulties when she finding the types of words related to health. Because PAY stated that:

Question: "What words do you find difficult in reading texts when you do the questions?"

PAY: "It is like a word about health sciences, if a text about something about health has a lot of vocabulary, it's foreign to me."

It can be concluded that when she worked on the TOEFL test, especially in the reading section, she had difficulties when the text she was doing the test reading on was related to health. This can happened because she reads a little about health.

Data III

AR had a low score in doing the TOEFL test and he stated that he had a lot of difficulty in answering the TOEFL test questions, especially in the reading section. He stated : *Interviewer : "So, are you having problems in vocabulary?"*

AR:" Yes, I have the problem in vocabulary moreover about the science or about business there is many difficult words for me, I like prefer to speaking than writing or reading. "

It can be concluded that he has difficulty when dealing with vocabulary related to science and business and he prefers speaking rather than having to write or read.

It can be concluded from the results of Data I, namely LL which had a higher TOEFL score, Data II is PAY which had a moderate TOEFL score, and last AR which had a lower score, they have the same difficulty in understanding certain vocabulary. LL who had a higher TOEFL score has difficulty understanding vocabulary related to science, while PAY who had a moderate TOEFL score is having difficulty understanding health-related vocabulary, and AR who had a lower TOEFL score has difficulty understanding words related to science and business. The three data have the same difficulty in understanding vocabulary based on the knowledge they have. Some students have difficulty when reading texts that are difficult to understand as conveyed by LL who has a high score on the TOEFL Test. Based on the theory of (Rivi Antoni:2014) the one of difficulties TOEFL test that was poor English mastery. The result focused on the reading section (Lee:2017) stated the difficulties in vocabulary to understand what stated in text, people need to understand most of the words in the text. Having a strong vocabulary is a key component of reading comprehension. Students can learn vocabulary through instruction but they typically learn the meaning of words through everyday experience and also by reading. Students have difficulty when they find certain vocabulary this can be caused because students do not read much about the vocabulary they do not understand. For example, LL who got a higher TOEFL score, got difficult when she get a texts related to science, it can be concluded that LL rarely reads a texts about science. Then PAY who got the moderate score had vocabulary difficulties related to health. It can be concluded that PAY is less interested related of health, so she had difficulty when she get a texts related to health. And the last, AR who got a lower score had difficulty answering reading questions because he did not understand vocabulary about science and business, therefore he had difficulty understanding the contents of the text. (Lee: 2017) stated people need to understand most of the words in the text, if a person cannot understand the meaning of a vocabulary then they have difficulty answering questions based on the text. Reading speed can affect students in answering reading questions in the TOEFL as stated by (Lee:2017) To read fluently, students need to instantly recognize word. Fluency speeds up when they can read and understand text. It is also important when students find irregular words, like of and the, which cannot be sounded out. Some students have difficulty when reading texts that are difficult to understand as conveyed by LL who has a high score on the TOEFL Test

Data IV

Interviewer: "what do you do, if you find out the difficulties sentence to understanding?"

LL: " there are some words that I already know the meaning, so if I get stuck on a difficult word I can read the sentence up to 3 times so I can understand the meaning. I'm guessing that's roughly what it means, I'm linking the word with another word, I'm connecting it, so guess what it means"

CONCLUSSION

From the result of interview question sheet, the researcher concluded that the theme which found after interviewing students were lack of spesific vocabulary, reading speed, and background knowledge. The students got difficulties from the parameter, the parameters was vocabulary, fluency dan reasoning and background knowledge. If they have many undertsanding about vocabulary, the students' would fluence in reading the text without read a text for many times. But in the fact students' had difference of background knowledge so they got different score in TOEFL test. It could be developed by the students who got moderate score and lower score to fixed their TOEFL score to had understanding about vocabulary and read many kinds of the text to help the students' understanding of the text. If the students have good preparation they would got high score but if the students' have not good preparation the students would got low score in TOEFL test.

On the other hand, Based on theory (Lee:2017) To understand what stated in text, people need to understand most of the words in the text. Having a strong vocabulary is a key component of reading comprehension. Students can learn vocabulary through instruction but they typically learn the meaning of words through everyday experience and also by reading. Students must understand a lot of words in a text and can learn vocabulary through everyday experience and reading a lot of texts. Students who do not have experience or had never read a text that was tested in the reading section, students would have difficulty in answering these questions. From this research, it shows that students who had difficulty because they do not have a background about the text being tested would have difficulty understanding the content of the text, vocabulary and spend a lot of time reading the text over and over again.

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