

ENGLISH STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN COMPLETING READING TOEFL SECTION AT EIGHT SEMESTER AT UNIVERSITAS JAMBI

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine whether TOEFL reading skills are more difficult for English study program of students at Universitas Jambi, based on TOEFL reading skills given to students in the eighth semester at Universitas Jambi, and whether TOEFL reading skills are difficult for English Study Program students at Universitas Jambi. The data of this study were collected using mixed method, quantitative design with a survey study and qualitative design with a descriptive study approach involved 23 participants. The participants in this study were eight semester students at English study program in Universitas Jambi. This study used the data collection TOEFL reading test, TOEFL reading score, and interview. TOEFL reading test was used for describing students' difficulty. Interview was used for investigating whether the students' experience the difficulties or not. The TOEFL reading test and an interview were main instruments in this study. TOEFL reading score was a supplementary instrument that can assist the researcher in selecting the students who needed a low grade to be questioned. Firstly, the students' experience the difficulty in reading section of TOEFL test such as lack of accuracy in reading, availability of time during test, and lack of vocabulary. Secondly, the result of this study showed that the ordering of difficulty items in TOEFL reading skills encompasses responding of transition questions (0.9), finding topic/main idea (0.21), finding specific information (0.21), and finding stated details (0.26).

Keywords: *TOEFL, Proficiency Test, and Reading.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the capability of mastering of English language worldwide is a crucial thing because English as international language that mostly used worldwide in various fields. However, students at every level of education ought to learn and master four skills of communication such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among those four skills, reading skills keep becoming a big problem for them since it does not only concern how to pronounce the words, clauses, or sentences correctly but also their understanding of what they have already read. Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is one of the proficiency tests that can measure students' capability in the mastering of English. This test has been appreciated internationally (Warfield, Laribee, & Geyer, 2013). [1].

Besides, there are main reasons why TOEFL is very crucial such as TOEFL is used to get scholarships to continue further study in English speaking countries. TOEFL is also used to apply for a job vacancy. The trust of TOEFL has grasped such a point that most domestic universities use this standardized test as a part of graduation requirements. The Policy of universities set this precondition because

they believe that TOEFL can evaluate students' ability and skills to comprehend English in academic tasks (Aliponga, 2013, p. 74). It can be summarized that TOEFL is a standardized test can become a requirement for students to pass the academic activities in colleges or universities. [2].

In this research, the researcher concerned with reading comprehension in TOEFL. Takido (2007, p.8) denoted that the reading section gauges the test taker's ability to comprehend university-level academic texts and passages. It meant this section is made to measure the ability to read and understand short passages have in common in topic and style to those that students were likely to prepare in North American universities and colleges. This section contains reading passages and questions about the passages. TOEFL stresses passages that are typical of those you will read in colleges and universities. Sharpe (2004,p.208) also stated that this section also tests students' knowledge of English vocabulary. The students must look for the synonyms for selecting words from the passage among the four answer choices that are given. To face this section, students needed extensive practice in reading a diversity of material, including newspapers and magazines. It also assisted in reading a variety of topics-American history, culture, social science, and natural science.[3]

Based on the preliminary study, the implementation of reading class, the students are taught how to preview main idea, scanning for detail, using context vocabulary, making inference of a passage, identifying exception, locating reference, and reading faster. These skills has been studied in academic reading course. However, there is still unclear what the students' difficulty in completing reading TOEFL section. Therefore, the researcher would like to propose research titled "Students' Difficulties in Completing Reading TOEFL Section at Eighth Semester at Jambi University, and the researcher elaborated two unanswered question [4], such as the following:

1. Do English Study Program students of Jambi University find TOEFL reading Skills difficult?
2. Which TOEFL reading skills are difficult according to English Study Program students of Jambi University?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Reading comprehension in general

Harris and Fodge (2008,p.83) stated that reading comprehension is defined as the production of meaning of written communication through a mutual, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message in a particular context. It means that reading comprehension as process of how the readers interpret of meaning of a written communication based on a specific context. In this case, the

readers must have knowledge and experience to understand the message and the purpose of written notification.

Further definition is proposed by Snow (2002, p.11) stated that reading comprehension as the process of concurrently obtaining and building meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. In other words, reading comprehension is the process of the readers to obtain and expand the meaning through interaction and involvement with the reading text. So, reading comprehension is not only interpret the meaning but also involve experience from the readers after they understand the content of the reading text.

Besides, in reading comprehension involves reading skill to understand a text and reading skill are the cognitive processes that a reader uses in making sense of text (Mikulecky, 2011). It means that how a reader tries to understand a text by involving cognitive process. There are three reading skills such as previewing, predicting, and skimming. Firstly, previewing means the process of gaining information through the contents of reading text and engage the readers to match the new information with what is already known (Mikulecky, 2011). In the other words, previewing is an activity which has been done by the readers through the contents of reading text so that it can assist the readers to compare the new information with what is already known. Secondly, Bailey (2015) stated that predicting an important reading strategy in which readers use information from a text (including titles, headings, pictures, and diagrams) and their own personal experiences to anticipate what are about to read (or what comes next). There are some reasons why predicting strategy very important such as predicting helps the readers to understand the text by linking clues with their own experiences, when the readers make predictions they can check their understanding of the text, and predicting can make the readers enjoyable in reading a text (retrieved www.teacherspayteachers.com). In addition, there are three steps in predicting such as before reading, during reading and after reading. Thirdly, skimming is used to quickly gather the most important information, or the gist of text (Sarwono & Purwanto, 2013). Furthermore, there are steps in skimming such as reading the first sentences each paragraph on the reading text, reading the last sentences each paragraph on the reading text, finding out keyword and comprehend paragraph where the keyword is found and returning to the question and choose the best answer (Noerhidajat, 2009).

Meanwhile, fluency is the result of many factors in reading, including accurate automatic decoding (recognize symbol word by word but it is not meaning), word knowledge, good prosody (the rhytm, stress, and intonation of speech), and reading speed. In other word, reading fluency can build a good comprehension in reading a text. In fact, according to Wolf (2007), “ fluency is a developmental process and many linguistic areas contribute to it such as phonology, orthography, vocabulary, syntax, and morphology” (www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id = 4470). Moreover, several direct approaches are effective for developing this aspect of reading fluency such as cloze exercises, scanning and training in reading faster. Firstly, cloze exercises can illustrate to students that they can comprehend a text without attending to every word. Secondly, scanning --- a high-speed reading skill can display students that it is sometimes necessary to skip many words when reading

for specific information. Thirdly, training in reading faster can make it physically impossible for students read every word. Pressure to speed up forces the reader to read for ideas, to look for key words and groups of words (collocations), and to skip over parts of the text (Levy, Nichols, & Kohen, 1993, quoted in McGuinness, 2004, p. 2007).

B. Reading Accuracy

According to the research of Samuels (2002), unable to obtain sufficient resources to decode words or comprehend the reading ability, so that readers have acquired excellent skills to improve reading accuracy. Readers can shift from the conscious decoding process to accurate or automatic decoding, thereby improving proficiency or accuracy. The most advantageous level of accurate reading focuses on the ability to find the meaning of text effortlessly during the reading process. At that level, people do not need to listen carefully to the sound of the word, but only automatically and accurately recognize the word when they see the text. Good readers rarely need to focus on finding the meaning of the text. This aspect separates the learning experience of the readers. The accuracy of the reading also requires that the reader have the ability to interpret or derive the meaning of words in the text during the reading process. The accuracy of the reading allows people to focus on the comprehension process or other related tasks, to find the meaning of the text combination. Therefore, fluency in reading is directly related to comprehension.

C. Reading Difficulty

The literature has reported many students find reading difficult because of several factors, one of them is their lack of ability to understand a particular text (Ali, 2012, p.5). Their limitation of vocabulary and some phrases could obstruct them from understanding the meaning of English texts (Fitriani, 2015). This impacts on the students' ability in answering questions in reading comprehension section of TOEFL test (Antoni, 2014).

In a study conducted by Alghail and Mahfoodh (2016), there is a number of difficulties faced by foreign students in a Malaysian university. The difficulties are in paraphrasing, note-taking, supporting ideas and managing the time for the reading test. Another researcher, Chawwang (2008) states that the most critical problems are in identifying difficult words, topic, the main idea of the passage, and lack of vocabulary. Similar research has been conducted by Nezami (2012) in EFL Saudi learners. In her research, she finds that their students are difficult to comprehend the text because of limited knowledge and skills.

D. Types of Reading Questions in Reading TOEFL Test

- Main idea: this type of this question usually ask about topic of the passage (What is the topic of the passage?, the text tells us

about....., the passage mainly discusses about....., and main idea of the text is.....), Subject of the passage (What is the subject of the passage?), main idea of the passage (What is the main idea of the passage?), the important things which are approved by author towards the passage (What is the author's main point in the passage?), the thing which has become author concerning (with what the author's primarily concerned?), and the best title for the reading text (Which of the following would be the best title ?).

- Stated detail questions: a stated asks about one piece of information in the passage rather than the passage as a whole. The answers to these questions are commonly given in the order in the reading text, and the best reply is often a restatement of what is absorbed in the passage. It means that the correct answer often expresses a similar idea as what has elaborated in the text, but the words are not the same (Phillips, 2001).
- Unstated Details: the questions asked about the information which is not mentioned in the passage. The answers to these questions are generally in the order in the reading text, and the correct answer is often found in reverse with the information which is required in the paragraph. It means that the correct answer often expresses the opposite idea as what is written in the paragraph.
- Find Pronoun Referents: in a pronoun reference question, it is crucial to comprehend that a noun is generally used first in the passage, and the pronoun that refers to it comes after. Whenever the test-takers are asked which noun a pronoun refers to, the test takers should look before the pronoun to find a noun.
- Implied detail question: the questions ask about implied information need a test – taker to restate the information of the passage with the own words based on the information which is conveyed in reading the text. The correct answer to these questions is directly related to the fact that has been mentioned in the passage but it is going to use different sentences.
- Vocabulary Questions: these questions usually test the test – taker in the vocabulary. The problems which are going to be asked generally about the meaning of the word in the reading text or the other word from the word which is going to be asked. The correct answer to these questions can be found by reading information which is in the context of the word location.
- Transition Questions: in the reading section of both the paper TOEFL test and the computer TOEFL test, you will sometimes be asked to determine what a probably came before the reading passage (in the preceding paragraph) or what probably comes after the reading passage (in the following paragraph). Of course, the topic of the preceding or following paragraph is not directly stated, and the test -

takers must draw a conclusion to determine what a probably in these paragraph.

E. Related Previous Studies

There are several studies that are conducted related to students' difficulties in completing reading TOEFL Section.

Firstly, the research was conducted by Fajri (2019). This research discussed the strategies used by students in completing reading TOEFL test, types of reading comprehension in TOEFL test that was difficult to be answered, and the most significant challenges factor for students in completing reading comprehension in TOEFL test, and the score of students 2nd STTIKOM Insan Unggul Cilegon – Banten. The sample is 20 advanced STTIKOM undergraduate students at Cilegon-Banten in Academic year 2018/2019 who were asked to do a PBT TOEFL reading comprehension test. For this research, the researcher used a qualitative study by using observation, interview, questionnaire and test as the instruments of collecting data. The result of the study found out that inference (33%), vocabulary (40%), and unstated details (50%) questions are the most difficult types to be answered by students. Students use three of the strategies (skimming and scanning, top-down and guess meaning) in answering reading comprehension in TOEFL test. The most significant challenges for students in solving TOEFL reading comprehension in TOEFL test are less motivation in reading a text, less practice and they did not master vocabulary well. Besides, the TOEFL score of STTIKOM Insan Unggul Cilegon-Banten was insufficient to achieve standardize test or low.

Secondly, the research was conducted by Samad, Jannah, and Fitriani (2017). This research discussed the undergraduate students' difficulties and their strategies in completing the TOEFL reading comprehension test. Thirty students of English Education Department of Syiah Kuala University had been involved as participants. For this research, the researchers used quantitative study and the instrument of the research uses worksheets of the TOEFL test and deliver questionnaires related to test-taking strategies used by the students. The result of the research found that there are five the most difficult skills in reading TOEFL Section such as answer implied detail questions correctly, the response stated detail questions correctly, the use of context to give meanings of difficult words, answer main idea questions correctly, and Determine implications from word parts.

Third, the research was conducted by Oktarina (2018). The research discussed students' difficulties in accomplishing the reading section of the TOEFL test. The total of participants are 15 students from Mandiri Class H. For this research, the researcher used descriptive quantitative research design. The result of the study found that the most difficult reading skills in TOEFL test encompass finding Main Idea, Implied Detail Question, Unstated Detail, and Stated Detail Question and Vocabulary Question.

Fourth, the research was conducted by Dede Rohadi Fajri (2019). The research discussed the strategies used by students in completing TOEFL reading comprehension test, types of reading comprehension in TOEFL test that was difficult to be answered by students, the greatest challenges factor for students in completing reading comprehension in TOEFL test, and the score of the 2nd semester students of STTIKOM Insan Unggul Cilegon-Banten. The sample was 20 advanced STTIKOM undergraduate students at Cilegon-Banten in Academic year 2018/2019 who were asked to do a PBT TOEFL reading comprehension test. For this research, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative study based on observation, interview, questionnaire and test as the instruments of collecting data. The result of the study found that inference (33%), vocabulary (40%) and unstated details (50%) questions are the most difficult types to be answered by students. Related to the strategy, three of the strategies (skimming and scanning, top down and guess meaning) are used by students in answering reading comprehension in TOEFL test. The greatest challenges for students in answering TOEFL reading comprehension in TOEFL test are less motivation in reading a text, less practice and they did not mastering vocabulary well. In addition, the TOEFL score of STTIKOM Insan Unggul Cilegon-Banten was insufficient to achieve standardize test or low.

Fifth, the research was conducted by Maizarah Nurzainal (2019). The research discussed the students' common difficulties in TOEFL Reading Comprehension. The total population used in this study was 23 students, the technique was used to take the sample is total sampling, so the sample of this study was 23 students of the second semester of English Study Program in the Islamic University of Indragiri Tembilahan. For this research, the researcher used a descriptive study. The result of study denoted that the skills that are considered to be the most difficult ones in TOEFL reading, which is skill 3. This skill is identifying stated detail questions correctly. It is the highest percentage (84%) with the total of the incorrect answer is 210 from 5 items.

Sixth, This research was conducted by Lovia Girsang, A., Marbun, F., Turnip, Y., and Saragih, E. (2019). The research discussed the difficulties that were felt by high students in answering reading comprehension questions on the TOEFL test. The subjects in this study were high school students from several campuses in Medan and their graduates varied from 2015 to 2019 who had taken toefl tests of 45 people consisting of 27 women and 18 men. For this research, the researchers used a phenomenology approach and employed qualitative research. The result of the study elaborated that the biggest problem in reading comprehension in the TOEFL test was due to the lack of interest in reading high school students so they would feel bored by seeing the text in front of them and it was still difficult for high school students to find the meaning of the text due to lack of vocabulary, and lack of practice to answer questions related to reading comprehension with the lack of practice, they think that the time to answer questions is not enough.

Overall this study has similar topic with these six related studies. The differences between the present study and other studies can be attributed some reasons. Firstly, in the previous study is to find out the strategies used by students in completing TOEFL reading comprehension test, types of reading comprehension in TOEFL test that was difficult to be answered by students, the greatest challenges factor for students in completing reading comprehension in TOEFL test. Secondly, in this study describes about the undergraduate students' difficulties and their strategies in reading TOEFL section. Thirdly, in this study has different in selecting sample that involves sixth semester in her research. Fourth, in this study showed that The greatest challenges for students in answering TOEFL reading comprehension in TOEFL test are less motivation in reading a text, less practice and they did not mastering vocabulary well. Fifth, in this study has different sample, location, and the focus on the research only focused common difficulty TOEFL skill in reading. Sixth, in this study has different approach in conducting research and also this study has different sample, that is fresh graduate of senior high school students.

Therefore, the result of his research has influenced me to gain deeply especially students' difficulties in completing reading TOEFL section at eighth semester at jambi university.

RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

In this study the researcher used mixed methods research design, both quantitative and qualitative approaches in single research to gather analyze data. The focus of research was to describe whether English study program students of Jambi University found TOEFL reading skills were difficult or not and to describe the which TOEFL reading skills were more difficult according to English study program of students of Jambi University. In this research, the sampling procedures that were used total sampling. A total sampling was drawn by a procedure in which every member had been taken from the whole population. It means that total sampling was suitable for this research because the researcher took the participants from the second classes in the eighth semester at English Department academic year 2021/ 2022 so it was not easy for researcher to identify students each individual. The students were taken by researcher about 40 students. In this case, it has been supported by Fraenkel & Wallen (2007) who asserted that samples larger than 30 are much likely to require meaningful results. All of the students at eighth semester have passed academic reading course that involves skills in reading especially in reading TOEFL section. Furthermore, the researcher took eighth semester students at English Department to identify types of reading question which the most difficult for each student at English Department. To identify types of reading question in TOEFL section, the researcher was conducted TOEFL test

through google form and based on the result of the test would assist the researcher to look for the types of reading question which the most difficult. Then, the researcher could choose the participants who required low score in TOEFL reading test to be interviewed by the researcher.

In this study, there were 23 students who gave their contributions in filling TOEFL reading test to get the general data information which all of them were in eighth semester of English study program in Jambi University. They were from class R01, R02 and R03. In this study, the researcher made the demographic background to know about their gender and semester (especially for eighth semester students of English study program).

After that, the researcher selected the participants whether required low score or high score in taking TOEFL test that had just been done. If they required low score, they would be asked to participate to be interviewed by the researcher. Finally, the researcher found that only eleven participants were able to answer 20 questions from 50 questions in TOEFL reading test.

Meanwhile, the researcher planned to investigate ten students as participants of the interview. However, when the researcher took the data, there were only four students willing to participate in this research. There were consist of two male students and two female students. The researcher assigned initial name. There were Ado, Apu, Fna, and Mfa.

B. Research Instrument

In this study, the researcher used TOEFL reading test, document analysis and interview. TOEFL reading test would be the main instrument that could assist the researcher to analyze students' difficulties in completing TOEFL reading section, an interview would be main instrument of this research whereas document analysis would be supplementary instrument of the current study.

TOEFL reading test was used to find out the most difficult in reading questions which has faced with the students. The researcher adopted 50 questions from Deborah Philips book. The selecting skills of the questions based on the reading Syllabus of the participants. In this case, the participants who have passed academic reading course, with the listed skills in the syllabus as showed on the following table. More detail descriptions will be explained in a table as follow:

Reading Skills of TOEFL	Number of item question
Topic/ Main Idea	1,12,21,32
Stated Detail question	2,6,8,15,17,20,23,25,28,35,36
Unstated detail question	13,46

Implied detail question	22,42,48
Vocabulary Question	3,4,5,7,9,14, 16,18,19,24,26,27,29,30,33,34, 37,38,39, 43,45,47,49
Where question	10,31,44,50
Transition	11,40,41
Total	50 Items

The percentages were obtained by using the following formula:

$$P = f/N \times 100\%$$

P : Percentage

f: Frequency (correct answer)

N : Maximum of correct answer

This research used in-depth interview as the main instrument of the research. The interview is used to investigate students' difficulties in completing reading TOEFL section which can assist the researcher gaining information deeply. In this case, the researcher used in-depth interview. It was caused by the researcher added some questions which were not included in the list of predetermined order.

However, in the implementation of the interview, the researcher would use telephone interview because the rule of the Indonesian government to keep social distancing during a pandemic Covid 19. These interviews based on agreement between the researcher, and the students. The researcher used protocol interview in in-depth interview which were by phone and recorded.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. Quantitative Parts

For TOEFL reading test, the researcher found that table 4.8 shows that are considered to be the most difficult ones in TOEFL reading, which is skill 7. This skill is responding of transition questions correctly. The range can be seen

on the table 4.4 shows that skill 7 required range 0.9 for level of difficulty items. Then, it is followed by skill 1 (0.21) which is finding topic/ main idea, skill 6 (0.21) which is finding specific information, and skill 2 (0.26) which is finding stated details. It can be seen on the table bellows:

Table 4.8 Level of Students' Difficulty in TOEFL Reading Skills

Aspect	Reading skills	Total correct answer each question	Students' correct answer	Range	Level of difficulty
I	Topic	4	5	0.21	Difficult enough
II	Stated Details	11	7	0.26	Difficult enough
III	Unstated Details	2	12	0.52	Moderate
IV	Implied Details	3	14	0.60	Moderate
V	Vocabulary in context	23	14	0.60	Moderate
VI	Where questions	4	5	0.21	Difficult enough
VII	Transition Questions	3	2	0.9	Difficult

Furthermore, based on students' record on TOEFL test shows that there are 50% students' university at Jambi University who got a difficulty in answering TOEFL reading test are only able to answer 20 questions from 50 questions on TOEFL reading test.

B. Qualitative Parts

For the interview, the researcher found that there was one main theme regarding with kinds of students' difficulties in TOEFL reading test. Three subthemes were obtained from the participants' responses about whether students' get difficulties in TOEFL reading test or not as written in the first research question. Three sub-themes encompass lack of accuracy in reading, lack of vocabulary, and availability of time during the test.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the results are divided according to the objectives, are as follows:

Whether English Study Program Students Of Jambi University Found TOEFL Reading Skills Are Difficult Or Not.

The results showed that English study program students of Jambi University found difficulty in TOEFL reading skills such as lack of accuracy in reading, availability of time during test, and lack of vocabulary. This results are consistent with Ali (2012), Fitriani (2015), Antoni (2014), and Alghail and Mahfoodh (2016) indicated that reading difficulties were caused several factors such as lack of ability to understand a particular text, their limitation of vocabulary from understanding the meaning of English text. Consequently, these impacts on the students' ability in

answering questions in reading comprehension section of TOEFL test has influenced their performance of the test.

The Most Difficult Skill in TOEFL Reading Test

Finding table table 4.8 shows that are considered to be the most difficult ones in TOEFL reading, which is skill 7. This skill is responding of transition questions correctly. The range can be seen on the table 4.8 shows that skill 7 required range 0.9 for level of difficulty items. Then, it is followed by skill 1 (0.21) which is finding topic/ main idea, skill 6 (0.21) which is finding specific information, and skill 2 (0.26) which is finding stated details. Based on the result of this study showed that the ordering of difficulty items in TOEFL reading skills encompasses responding of transition questions (0.9), finding topic/main idea (0.21), finding specific information (0.21), and finding stated details (0.26).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this research, the purposes that want to be achieved were to describe which TOEFL reading skills are more difficult according to the English study program of students of Jambi University which was given to students at eighth semester and to describe whether English Study Program students of Jambi University found TOEFL reading skills are difficult or not. Based on the findings and discussion from her study. Firstly, the results showed that English study program students of Jambi University found difficulty in TOEFL reading skills such as lack of accuracy in reading, availability of time during the test, and lack of vocabulary. Secondly, the result of this study showed that the ordering of difficulty items in TOEFL reading skills encompasses responding of transition questions required item difficulty (0.9), finding topic/main idea required item difficulty (0.21), finding specific information required item difficulty (0.21), and finding stated details required item difficulty (0.26).

In this research, the students in at English Study Program have kinds of difficulties in TOEFL reading skills. Here, the researcher suggests some recommendations for the students and the lecturer. For students, students have to have a habit to read a scientific article to develop their vocabularies and increase their comprehension of reading text. For the lecturer, the lecture should develop students' vocabularies in reading by finding similar meaning and the opposite meaning. Then, the lecture should show how to guess the meaning based on the context.

Furthermore, for the other researcher who is interested in conducting the other research but in the same scope, it will be better to gain more deep information about students' difficulties in TOEFL reading skills. Finally, this research on students' difficulties in TOEFL reading skills could also be extended outside the college, it is considered that language learning takes place elsewhere, too.

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