

## INVESTIGATING THE PROBLEM OF STUDENTS' LOW SCORE IN READING SECTION AT TOEFL CLASS

Investigating the Problem of Students' Low Score in Reading Section at TOEFL Class

### **Torikin**

English Language Teaching Study Program  
Postgraduate School, Universitas Islam Malang, Indonesia  
[torikadnan9@gmail.com](mailto:torikadnan9@gmail.com)

### **Muhammad Yunus**

[m.yunus@unisma.ac.id](mailto:m.yunus@unisma.ac.id)

### **Mutmainnah Mustofa**

[inamustofa@unisma.ac.id](mailto:inamustofa@unisma.ac.id)

### **Sonny Elfiyanto**

[sonny.elfiyanto@unisma.ac.id](mailto:sonny.elfiyanto@unisma.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

The main focus of this research is to investigate the students' ability in English as a second of foreign language in the reading section. The subject of this study was ten students of Kanzun Najah Batu. The research was a survey qualitative. The data collection technique was a questionnaire survey via Google Sheets and in-depth interview techniques recorded face-to-face using smartphones. Ten students participated in the questionnaire survey and five students participated in the in-depth interviews. Analyze and interpret data through qualitative procedures. The study focused on finding out the difficulties students face when answering TOEFL questions in the reading section. The study was limited to the difficulties faced by Kanzun Najah Batu students who had previously taken the test of TOEFL for any purpose of answering the TOEFL test. The findings of this study are the difficulties students face in answering TOEFL test questions in the reading section, mainly due to a lack of basic skills, less practice, less motivation, and individual differences among students.

**Keywords:** TOEFL, Reading

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the improvements universities have made to produce the best graduates and to be able to compete in employment opportunities is the mastery of English. Therefore, to improve students' English proficiency, most universities will conduct some tests to measure students' English learning ability (Nurhayani & Berita 2016).

The benefits of being able to read are increasing vocabulary and learning new information, which is the foundation for developing other skills such as speaking and writing. (Krashen, Lee, & La, 2017) Through reading, readers can develop their better writing skills, high vocabulary, and good language structure in terms of grammar. There are two types of reading: intensive reading and extensive reading (Waring, R; McLean, S; 2015). ER will not work properly unless some form of accountability is in place. Extensive reading, on the other hand, is reading freely, reading for pleasure. Its effectiveness in language learning is well known, and improving reading comprehension is one example. (Mutmainnah, M, 2021).

At the same time, language tests are considered a valuable source of information about the effectiveness of learning and teaching. A test is a method of measuring student abilities, knowledge, or performance in a specific area. (Desheng and Vergese, 2013) pointed out that tests not only assess the progress and achievement of learners, but also the effectiveness of the teaching material and method used.

Taking an English proficiency test in a country that requires English as a foreign language serves as a valid test of one's English ability. English proficiency tests are not only for trying to study abroad but also for completing university requirements, especially in institutions. According to Clark (2014), the TOEFL test is used by more than 9,000 colleges, universities, and institutions in over 130 countries to help them make admissions decisions, making it the most widely accepted the English language according to ETS (Educational Testing Service) exam is tested worldwide.

However, the students reported that they also find it difficult and confusing when the teacher gives them the reading passages of the TOEFL test. The researcher asked if the reading had been taught, and the students answered yes. They also think that they are lazy to read long texts, they also think that they do not know some words in the text, which makes them confused to understand the story. which focuses on problems and difficult factors that students encounter in the reading section of the TOEFL. A better understanding of student problems not only allows students to be aware of their weaknesses, but also allows teachers to plan appropriate materials or teaching methods to improve responsiveness students for the reading sections of the TOEFL.

In the context of this study, the research university that applied the TOEFL guide was Kanzun Najah Batu Boarding School. Kanzun Najah has asked its undergraduate students to take the TOEFL as one of the dissertation defense requirements for a TOEFL passing score, with an expected 410 for non-English majors and 450 for English majors. As Salman Firmansyah, Nadzir Azhari, and Zainal Musthafa (2021) point out, the provision of such a policy may lead to different responses among students; thus, students' perceptions of the test may affect the way they take the test, including their motivation, their preparation and their performance on the exam. Therefore, it is important to note that student preparation for the TOEFL Predictive Test is the language center of the university and its administered test and the learning strategies and demand for students that the English class test must take into account.

Hence, in an attempt to fill the gap in the studies concerning the reading section at TOEFL. To reach the purpose of this research, the researcher sets out two questions; below:

1. What are the problems of students who low score in reading section at TOEFL class of boarding school Kanzun Najah?
2. What are the difficult factors of students who low score in reading section at TOEFL class of boarding school Kanzun Najah?

## **METHOD**

The researchers used descriptive qualitative in this study to give a full description and explanation. Erna (2018) said: "there are several data collecting methods in the qualitative research, but the most commonly used are questionnaire and interview". The interview is used to collect the data needed for research.

The participants in this study were ten students who had a low score in the reading section TOEFL test at Boarding school Kanzun Najah Batu. So, researchers need to get the results and understand the reading part of the TOEFL score.

In this research, the researcher interviewed 10 participants who had a low score on the TOEFL test. The researchers took 5-10 minutes to interview each participant. The data from the interview was recorded and transcribed the data started from 5 until 8 August 2021 at Boarding School Kanzun Najah Batu.

The instrument in this research used a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 12 statements about reading problems. It consists of reading the problem related to fewer basic skills, practice, motivation, and student individual different. After collecting the data through the interview, the data were then analyzed by descriptive qualitative data analysis. Joko (2016) said "data qualitative is data received that will be presented in explanation section which is not in numeral form, although in some explanation is also found the numeral as divvy from explanation.

To analyze the data gained from the interview, the author uses thematic analysis to analyze the data. According to Alhojailan & Ibrahim (2012) "thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis. It is used to analyses classifications and present themes (patterns) that relate to the data".

The researcher used some steps to analyze the data from the interview to answer the second research question about the difficult factors of students' low scores in the reading section in the TOEFL class. This instrument was validated by Dr. Alfian Zuhairi. He is a lecturer at Universitas Islam Malang. The researchers used a voice recorder to record and transcribed the conversation. In the transcribed interview, a number is given to each participant. For example, code 1: P1 meant interview, participant 1, and so forth. After that, the data was analyzed based on the questions.

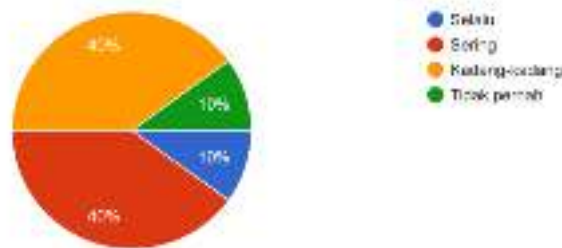
## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

Researchers explain the problems students face when answering TOEFL test questions. These questions are then formulated based on the finding obtained from the questionnaires data, explained as follows:

#### 1. Fewer Basic Skill

Problems faced by the students related to their problems in answering test TOEFL is a fewer basic skill. It is found that their reason for taking the TOEFL test is only for one of the requirements of study completion fulfillment.



**Figure 1.1 Fewer Basic Skill on Problem Students Reading Section in TOEFL**

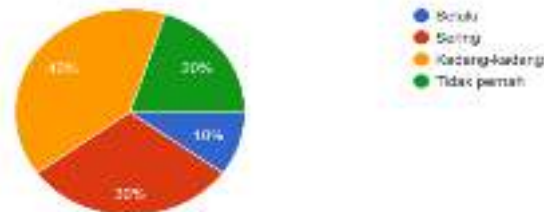
From the figure above, it can be found that a percentage is 40% of 4 students have a negative perception of the reading section TOEFL. They are chosen "Often" because of the identifying determining main idea of the passage with very long sentences, poor knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical confusion in reading text TOEFL. There were four students the percentage is 40%, who have a positive perception in identifying the determining main idea, they are

choosing *"Sometimes"*, because they can answer which use their strategies, and know the main idea in the reading text.

On the other hand, there was one student 10%, who choose *"Always"* to identify determining the main idea because he knows the way to answer the question of determining the main idea. Besides that, one student chose *"Never"*, the reason is that he has less vocabulary and he is still confused with the meaning of the word, so he cannot identify the reading text.

## 2. Less Practice

The problem students face when answering the TOEFL test is practice. found out that the reason they took the TOEFL was just one of the requirements to complete their studies.



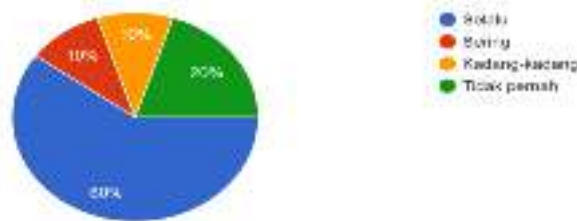
**Figure 1.2 Less Practice on Problem Students Reading Section in TOEFL**

From the valid questionnaire result, there was one student or 10%, *"Never"* for point of less practice, it should negative perception for reading section TOEFL, it afraid false when it doing the test of reading. This may be the case because they have not adopted English as a habit. In addition, the lack of awareness of the importance of English makes them less interested in practicing English. Suppose they still need to adjust for the TOEFL even though they have been studying English for years. This means that a specific time should be allocated to tutor the TOEFL. Meanwhile, it shows that the students mostly chose *"Often"*, the percentage of 30% from three students, they cannot manage the time, if they do the test of reading text, they waste the time reading the text, and they confused with the meaning of the vocabulary, phrase, verb, and pronoun.

There were four students or a percentage of 40% They need more practice. Although the exercises have been carried out twice or two times, it is still considered to be lacking. They would do as much as possible. At the same time, some popular English courses generally conduct 3 TOEFL simulations and take the test as an entrance test before students take the class to test students' preliminary understanding of the test TOEFL. A second test is then held in the middle of the courses.

### 3. Less Motivation

The problem students face when answering the TOEFL test is motivation. It was found that the reason they took the TOEFL was just one of the requirements to complete their studies.



**Figure 1.3 Less Motivation on Problem Students Reading Section in TOEFL**

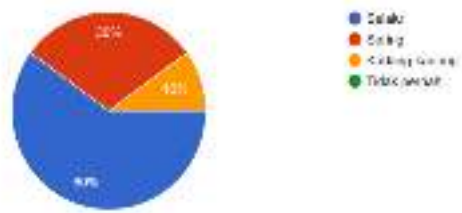
It is proved by the number of students who are stated their purpose as mentioned before is the highest one, there are ten students. Six students (60%) said that they want to continue their studies because they want to get the carrier of their life and they have already studied about TOEFL, especially in the reading section, but the result of their score determines their carrier study.

Only one student (10%) selected "*Often*", which said that join test TOEFL only for testing their ability in TOEFL. Although the test reason was to apply for a job, he has a positive perception because he tries to know his ability. On the other hand, there is 10% of student select the point of "*Sometimes*", because he wants to know how to join the TOEFL test and what kinds of test shows on the TOEFL test. Meanwhile, 2 students 20% selected "*Never*"; they said that the price TOEFL test is so expensive, This also happens because of the financial problems of the students. This situation affects their motivation to attend TOEFL Preparation or Try out hosted by institutions, universities, and English courses.

### 4. Student's Individual Differences

There were ten students investigated, they were classified based on the area where they are coming from, three students from Kota Batu, three students from Pamekasan, and the rest of the students are from Brebes, Jombang, and Sampang. Six students claimed that they had taken the TOEFL test twice in Unisma online, and four students claimed that they had taken the TOEFL test once. All of students who have joined the test, there are seven of them got 310, and three students got the score for about 400. The students said that their local languages affect their ability in understanding English, especially when they have to answer reading sections. From a question about the influence of their local

language. Additionally, three students reported that their local language did not influence them at all.



**Figure 1.4 Student's Individual Differences in Problem Students Reading Section in TOEFL**

In the figure above, there six students, or 60% percentage select the point as *"Always"*, they still depend on with first language or (local language), when they read the text reading TOEFL they are afraid to do wrong because the vocabulary is not same with the sound of the word. So, they do not want to practice it. Of the three students 30% percentage them select *"Often"*, and only one student or 10% selected *"Sometimes"* because he ever stayed on course and always practice what he wants to practice such as reading the text loudly and silently.

## Discussion

As explained earlier, this motivation is a major factor in students' difficulty in answering the questions. Considering the statement of Alizadeh (2016), there are four types of motivation. Motivation is divided into instrumental, comprehensive, Intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to learning a language as a means to achieve instrumental goals, such as career development, reading technical materials, translation, etc. Therefore, the results of this study, one of the reasons students take the TOEFL test is because of the academic requirements for completing their studies.

Most respondents responded that they took the TOEFL test for a reason, because the minimum scores vary from campus to campus, sometimes far from international standards, TOEFL questions are not taken seriously by students. They do not seem to be giving it their all since the issue, but they're still afraid of failure. This shows that they lack a sense of competence and self-confidence, which is crucial.

In addition, as a lot of as ten out of six students (60%) said they needed more TOEFL practice. Meanwhile, the rest felt no need for TOEFL practice. Sadly, they have low TOEFL scores but are in no rush to get higher test scores. As for individual differences among students, such as respondents' age, gender or ethnic identity, etc. It seems that there is no impact on the students' TOEFL difficulty. This finding is

supported by the findings of a study by Mehrpour and Hosseini in a journal (2015). They sought to find out the influence of ethnic identity and motivation on the English proficiency of Balochi learners.

During the survey period, they collected data from a group of Balochi English learners using simplified versions of the Common Ethnicity Questionnaire, the Motivation Questionnaire, and the TOEFL Sample Test. Multiple regression and correlation analyses were then performed on the collected data. The results showed that ethnic identity and motivation had no significant effect on learners' language ability. Likewise, a non-significant correlation was found between racial identity and motivation.

However, students' basic skills, especially English, have less basic skill, but if they are very motivated to learn English, it will lead them to practice more and more and automatically achieve the best effect of acquiring high skills. Also, even if a student is smart and lazy, he/she will be beaten by mediocre but hardworking people.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Based on the finding and discussions of the data analysis. It found that students' questions in the TOEFL Boarding school of Kanzun Najah reading section mainly came from the main questions. There are fewer basic skills, which are related to a student's previous ability to answer questions on the TOEFL test that may come from both external and internal students.

For further research, hopefully, they can investigate a study on another proficiency in the TOEFL test and that study can serve as a reference for studies on the same topic. For further research, the online questionnaire should not be used as we do not know if the participants understood the meaning of the statement correctly or if we can change the questionnaire to Indonesian.

## **REFERENCES**

- Bakir, S. (2016). *Strategi Sukses TOEFL*. Tangerang Selatan: Paper Plus Publisher.
- Brown, D. H. (2005). *Language Assessment: Principle and Classroom Practices*. New York: Pearson Education Inc.
- Davoudi, M. &. (2014). *The effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL).
- Fajar, S. (2019). *The Difficulties Faced by Students in Reading Comprehension Section of National Examination. (Unpublished)*. Banda Aceh: Syiah Kuala University.



- Febriani, D. E. (2019). Reading Comprehension Problem in Reading Section of TOEFL Test. *JLAAL, Journal of Applied Linguistic and Literasi*.
- Grellet, F. (1999). *Developing Reading Skill: A Practice Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercise*. Cambridge: Cambridge Press .
- Jannah, M. F. (2018). *EFL Students' Strategies dealing with Common Difficulties in TOEFL Reading Comprehension Section*. *International Journal of language Education*.
- Kopitski, M. (2007). *Exploring the Teaching of Inference Skills (A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language)*. Minnesota: Hamline University.
- Krashen, L. &. (2017). *Comprehensible and Compelling*. Libraries Unlimited.
- Latief, M. a. (2011). *Research Methods in Language Learning an Introduction*. Malang: UM Press.
- mahmud. (2018). *The EFL students' problems in answering the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): A study in Indonesian context*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*.
- Mustofa, M. (2021). *The Students' Perception of Extensive Reading in Online Learning at Flsp Class*. *Journal of English for Academic Specific Purpose (JEASP)*.
- Nehe, N. &. (2016). *Analyze Students' Strategies in Answering Reading of the Toefl Test*. *Journal of English Language Studies*.
- Waring, R. &. (2015). *Exploration of the Core and Variable Dimensions of Extensive Reading Research and Pedagogy*. *Reading in a Foreign Language*.