

Learning TOEFL Experiences of English and Non-English Students

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Abstract

This article was created to explain the results of learning experience of Indonesian English and Non-English students in TOEFL subject. The method used in this research was qualitative research method with a scientific approach. In this study, the researcher used participants coming from different Universities in Indonesia, namely; Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. All the data were obtained through interviews which were categorized into thematic analysis. The results showed that TOEFL became a compulsory course that must be taken by English students and became a reference for getting a good job for non-English students.

Keywords: *English students, Job, Non-English students, TOEFL*

Abstrak

Artikel ini dibuat untuk mendeskripsikan perbedaan pengalaman belajar TOEFL oleh mahasiswa Bahasa Inggris dan mahasiswa bukan jurusan bahasa Inggris. Metode penelitian ini mengaplikasikan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan saintifik. Pada penelitian ini, subjek penelitian yang dipilih adalah mahasiswa yang berasal dari jurusan yang berbeda, yaitu; mahasiswa bahasa Inggris dan mahasiswa bukan jurusan bahasa Inggris berasal dari berbagai Perguruan Tinggi, yaitu; Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Seluruh data diperoleh melalui wawancara dan seluruh hasil wawancara dikategorikan dengan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa seluruh mahasiswa berpendapat bahwa TOEFL menjadi kewajiban bagi seluruh mahasiswa untuk dijadikan sebagai dasar mendapatkan pekerjaan.

Kata kunci: *Tata Bahasa Inggris, Struktur Tata Bahasa.*

1. Introduction

TOEFL is designed to measure the English proficiency of people whose native language is not English (Pratiwi et al., 2021). It is a test proficiency in the field of English to determine a person's ability without being directly linked to the teaching and learning process (Netta & Trisnawati, 2019). Therefore, TOEFL is different from an achievement test, in which scope is limited to the material that the test-takers have studied in an English class. People around the world

have begun to use English as a way to communicate with each other. When interacting with foreigners, English is also used as an official language. Communicating effectively in English is often used as a barometer to determine a person's place in several areas of life, including politics, business, the economy, society, and higher education. Therefore, many Indonesians are trying to learn English, which is regarded as a prerequisite for many global companies when applying for positions. Standardized tests are often used as a benchmark for measuring English proficiency. One of the most common tests used to measure students' English proficiency is TOEFL prediction or institutional TOEFL test. Many colleges and universities utilize the TOEFL to indicate how well a student is doing academically throughout their stay at the university. Considering its importance, TOEFL exam is required for graduation at several Indonesian universities. Besides, the factor that makes TOEFL test popular is the benefit the test provides. To continue their education at an American or English-speaking university, whether through a scholarship program or without one, non-native students and applicants must pass TOEFL examination.

Academic and professional language skills are tested on TOEFL. Reading Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Listening Comprehension comprise the three components of TOEFL. Part A, B, and C of the TOEFL always begin with Listening Comprehension, followed by Parts A and B of Structure and Written Expression and Part C of Reading Comprehension. The three portions of TOEFL test each have 140 questions. Research on the topic of TOEFL has been studied by other Researchers but no has examined the experiences of English and non-English students in TOEFL subject. For that reason we will examine this topic so that it becomes a reference for future research.

2. Literature Review

TOEFL is design to measure the English proficiency of people whose Native language is not English (Pratiwi et al., 2021). It is a test proficiency in the field of English to determine a person's ability without being directly linked to the teaching and learning process (Netta & Trisnawati, 2019). Therefore, TOEFL is different from an achievement test, in which scope is limited to the material that the test-takers have studied in an English class.

Experts generally highlights TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) as a reliable measure of English proficiency. Literature emphasizes its validity and fairness in assessing language skill, including reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Researcher often commend its alignment with real word communication demands and its role in facilitating educational and professional opportunities for non-native English speakers. However, discussion may also address potential challenges, such as test anxiety or cultural, underscoring the importance of considering diverse perspective in evaluating TOEFL's effectiveness.

The paper-based TOEFL exam is the one that is frequently administered in the field of education. As a scholarly demand, TOEFL is accepted as a test of official English language proficiency for college, PhD, and postdoctoral students. Sharpe (2004) contributed For those who utilize English as a foreign language and continue their studies overseas using English as their first language, TOEFL must be taken in order to pursue further education.

According to the ETS (English Testing Program) book from 2006, students' English ability as a foreign language is assessed using TOEFL. According to Komari (2008), there are three different forms of TOEFL: paper-based, computer-based (CBT), and TOEFL administered online (IBT). Students at Universitas Teuku Umar continue to take TOEFL PBT or paper-based TOEFL method since it is thought to be an inexpensive and simple exam. Additionally, regional establishments and businesses continue to accept this TOEFL PBT certificate, provided that the organization that issued the test is a recognized or language of government establishment.

Many communities of linguistics in the English village share the same goal of learning English (Nurhayati et al., 2013). Language services including basic, intermediate, and advanced classes are offered by English village course providers. TOEFL preparation program is the last curriculum offered in the English class. A curriculum for education is TOEFL preparation course to enhance students' comprehension of academic English through reading, writing, and listening Sakura (2020). One of the international exams for English competence is TOEFL (Ismail & Othman, 2020; Min & Syamsuddin 2014). Furthermore, TOEFL represents an accumulation of students' English learning results and accomplishments, according to Ali (2012). Consequently, this demonstrates rather clearly that given that TOEFL exam gauges how well pupils have mastered English.

Related to the above discussion, there is a significant difference from previous student studies in English and non-English students of the research object in which the present study focuses on their experiences with its own characteristics. Therefore, there is a research enhancement in English proficiency area by finding out the difference's implementation of a Comparison of TOEFL Learning Outcomes Among English and Non-English

3. Method

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is not a universal graduation requirement, some universities and academic programs may have English language proficiency requirements for graduation, and they may accept TOEFL scores as one way to fulfill this requirement. In Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al Wahliyah where TOEFL is a mandatory subject, students or those for whom English is not fluent in English maybe required to demonstrate a certain level of English proficiency to successfully complete their degree. This requirement aims to ensure that students have the language skills necessary to engage effectively in coursework and communicate in an academic setting.

In Indonesia, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is commonly taken by individuals who are applying to study or work in English-speaking countries. TOEFL assesses the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers. You can find information about TOEFL testing centers, registration procedures, and test dates on the official ETS (Educational Testing Service) website. ETS is the organization that administers TOEFL. It's advisable to check the official website or contact local test centers for the most accurate and up-to-date information regarding TOEFL testing in Indonesia. Additionally, you may find information on test preparation resources to help you perform well on the exam.

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is designed to assess the English language proficiency of individuals whose native language is not English. Participants in TOEFL test are typically individuals seeking to pursue higher education or professional opportunities in English-speaking countries. TOEFL test assesses proficiency in reading, listening, speaking, and writing. It's important for participants to check the specific requirements of the institution or organization they are applying to, as score requirements may vary. Participants can register for TOEFL test through the official ETS (Educational Testing Service) website and choose a test center based on their location.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

Interview using samples that have previously been described. In the discussion, the Researchers explain the data obtained from analyzing the students, where the context is the experiences about TOEFL learning. The following is an explanation of each data:

Data 1

Major : English Language Education
Learning English Experience : More than 3 years

Researcher : *Sorry for interrupting your time, Can I do Interview for a while?*

Participant : *It's okay never mind, what is the questions?*

Researcher : *Have you ever studied TOEFL Preparation?*

Participant : *Yes, I have studied TOEFL which is during my lecture in university as an English Language Education Student Department*

Researcher : *Great! have you ever had TOEFL Exam*

Participant : *Yes, I have taken an online exam, there is I got from online course on Instagram and Facebook*

- Researcher* : Would you like tell me, what are difficulties do you have when studying TOEFL preparation and taking TOEFL exam /
- Participant* : In my opinion, the difficulty is when I don't understand the complicated English structure, it is so difficult to answers structure and written expression
- Researcher* : By the way, do you have any tips for TOEFL exam?
- Participant* : based on my experience, learn a lot of English grammar from any references and take TOEFL mock test as much as we can, and don't forget to practice more often
- Researcher* : Oh, I see, thank you for taking the time for me to interview you
- Participant* : Alright, my pleasure.

In data 1, the information was obtained that TOEFL is a compulsory course that must be followed by all students in the English education department. However, students should also learn from other platforms in order to gain more knowledge about TOEFL. The difficulty experienced by students when studying and taking TOEFL exam is when we don't understand English well so that is difficult to answer. For this reason, futher learning about TOEFL needed.

Data 2

- Major : English Literature
Learning English Experience : More than 4 years

- Researcher* : Hi, this interview is carried out to know more about your TOEFL studying experiences. Have you ever studied TOEFL?
- Participant* : Yes, I have studied TOEFL in my university as one of the compulsory subjects and I take some books from online to learn about it.
- Researcher* : Nice. Have you ever had TOEFL Exam ?
- Participant* : Yes, I have taken online exam
- Researcher* : What do you think about the difficulty of understanding the context of grammar of TOEFL question?
- Participant* : In my way, the difficulty is about grammar or structure English, I need longer time to finish one question specially in structure and written expression.
- Researcher* : by the way, do you have any tips for TOEFL exam?
- Participant* : Ok, for the tips I suggest you to be more diligent studying about TOEFL and take some free TOEFL test both online and exam.
- Researcher* : That's really nice, I do agree with you practice makes easier.. ok thank you so much for answering my questions

Participant : *Thanks, I am so happy to be part of this research*

In data 2, the information was obtained that TOEFL is a compulsory course that must be followed by all students in the English literature. However, students should also learn from other platforms in order to gain more knowledge about TOEFL like from TOEFL Books or online platform. The difficulty experienced by students when studying and taking TOEFL exam is when we don't understanding about the context of English grammar so that is difficult to answer. For this reason, we need more diligent in learning about TOEFL and often practice questions if you can take TOEFL exam as often as possible.

Data 3

Major : Non-English Student (Law Department)
Learning English Experience : More than 4 years

Researcher : *What do you know about TOEFL test?*

Participant : *I know a little bit about TOEFL, one of the subjects that I really focus on because it really needs to looking for a job today*

Researcher : *You seem to like learning English even though you're not English student. Have you ever taken TOEFL exam?*

Participant : *Yes, I take online TOEFL test last month*

Researcher : *After studying and taking TOEFL test, what are the most difficult parts you face during learning TOEFL?*

Participant : *I think, the most difficult part is understanding Text in reading comprehension. I often understand it word by word*

Researcher : *Yups, we waste time translate each word. do you have any tips for TOEFL exam?*

Participant : *Sure. in my opinion, we must have TOEFL preparation book and several materials in order to increase references regarding what materials are mostly found out in the real test.*

Researcher : *Alright, thank you for your time answering my questions.*

In data 3 we can know that TOEFL is not a compulsory course that must be taken in this faculty but students need TOEFL certificates to support better jobs. Students are required to learn by using other platforms as support. The thing that becomes difficult when studying and TOEFL exam experienced by students is when we don't understanding the context of the text provided by the source and the solution is to read more literature related to TOEFL, increase references regarding what materials.

Data 3

Major	: Mathematics
Learning English Experience	: Less than 2 years
Researcher	: <i>Sorry for disturbing your time, can I have interview with you?</i>
Participant	: <i>What interview about?</i>
Researcher	: <i>It is about learning TOEFL experience</i>
Participant	: <i>Certainly, go ahead</i>
Researcher	: <i>Have you ever studied TOEFL?</i>
Participant	: <i>Yes, I have, I learn TOEFL online</i>
Researcher	: <i>Good, what about TOEFL test? Did you take TOEFL test?</i>
Participant	: <i>Yup, it is also online, I take TOEFL online two times, one is mock test and the other one is real TOEFL test. It was hard.</i>
Researcher	: <i>Yup, everybody knows TOEFL test is challenging. Do you have difficulties of studying and taking TOEFL test?</i>
Participant	: <i>Grammar... it is absolutely difficult; I have to understand the context first and memorize English structure. It is so difficult</i>
Researcher	: <i>Yup, I do agree with you, structure and written expression is about practice and habit, we can't memorize all English structures. Do you have any suggestion for TOEFL learners?</i>
Participant	: <i>Sure, for me learning and practice a lot, as you say that it is not about memorizing all English structure and vocabulary, it is about habit of understanding English.</i>
Researcher	: <i>It is nice interview, thank you so much for all the answers.</i>

In data 4. the information above TOEFL is not a compulsory course that must be taken in this faculty but students need TOEFL certificates to support better jobs. Students are required to learn by using other platform as support. The thing that becomes difficult when studying and TOEFL exam experienced by students is when we don't understand about English and the solution is to often practice TOEFL exam both online and offline.

4.2 Discussion

The problems faced by English language learners described in the previous section can be divided into four major categories. They can be divided into four major problems. This result is similar to the "common problems in learning English. However, in this finding, we found a more specific problem that is not explained by the theory. The pronunciation problem was not found because the TOEFL test does not have a speaking part (predicted). As mentioned earlier, there are four common problems in learning English: low motivation, poor vocabulary, poor grammatical understanding, pronunciation, and working memory.

1. Lack of English Skill and Knowledge: This point deals with the problems students face in English skill and knowledge. It is a lack of English Skill and Knowledge. All respondents indicated that they have problems with their English skills and stated the same. They have difficulty with listening to words and sounds, they have problems with speaking speed in the listening section, etc. Also respondents also stated that unfamiliar words were an obstacle in answering the questions. They also had trouble following unfamiliar topics in the Listening and Reading sections.

They also had trouble following unfamiliar topics in the Listening and Reading sections and lost the main idea. A respondent also indicated that in the Listening and Reading sections, they were able to understand the

words, but not the intended message. In the Grammar and Structure section, respondents said that they were confused about the correct structure of the test and that they could not distinguish between the subject, object, and verb of a sentence.

2. Poor time management: this point deals with time management issues that students face addressed. There were 12 respondents who indicated that they had problems with time management. Four respondents indicated that they had problems with time management. They stated that they were not able to allocate their time wisely, so when the time came, they still had not finished the test. Also, they were not time conscious. They also admitted that they concentrated on the questions without being aware of the time and were unaware of the time limit. They also admit that he concentrated on the problems without being aware of the time and was unaware of the time limit. These problems were encountered in the Reading and Listening section, and these problems were frequently observed when faced with the listening section.
3. Lack of Concentration: This point deals with the problems students face with regard to concentration. Eight respondents indicated that they had problems dealing with concentration issues. Four respondents dealt with concentration problems. When answering the test, I had to avoid noise because it breaks my concentration. Because it would break their concentration. Furthermore, respondents also had problems when answering the last part of the test. In the reading test, I could not concentrate 100% because I was sleepy, tired, bored, etc.
4. Memory Problem: This point deals with the problems that English language learners face in memorization. It is the problem of memorization. This problem of memorization was identified by three respondents. From the interview data, two specific problems were found. One is that they forget words and phrases they have just read in the reading section. Unfortunately, when the recording stops, it is impossible to remember 100% of its content. The following advice was also given. Another piece of advice was that during the listening part, it is better to make small notes to help you remember what you have recorded. The following advice was given.

Yet, TOEFL score is not always not the predictor of students' performance, particularly for non-English students (Grain et al., 2022; Dalman, 2023).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the experiences of English and non-English students in learning and taking the TOEFL exam. The data collected through interviews revealed some key findings. For English students who are required to take TOEFL as part of their degree program, the main challenges included lack of English skills and knowledge, poor time management, lack of concentration, and memory problems. These issues were often influenced by their study habits, with high-scoring students exhibiting better habits like active note-taking, consistent practice, and effective time management.

On the other hand, non-English students typically took TOEFL to demonstrate English proficiency for employment or further education opportunities. Their primary difficulties revolved around comprehending unfamiliar vocabulary, understanding textual context, and managing time effectively during the exam. Regardless of their academic background, all students emphasized the importance of diligent English learning, frequent TOEFL practice, and expanding their knowledge through diverse reference materials.

Overall, the findings highlight the need for targeted support and skill development, particularly in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and time management strategies, to help both English and non-English students overcome the hurdles they face in TOEFL preparation and performance. Addressing these challenges can ultimately enhance their English language proficiency and increase their chances of success in academic or professional pursuits requiring TOEFL certification.

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