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## STUDENTS' ABILITY TO ANSWER COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS ON TOEFL-LIKE TEST

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh keharusan untuk mengikuti institusional TOEFL dengan nilai minimal bagi setiap mahasiswa Universitas Bung Hatta yang akan menyelesaikan studinya. Dampak yang diharapkan dengan penerapan regulasi ini adalah peningkatan kemampuan bahasa Inggris lulusannya. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan kemampuan mahasiswa dalam menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tentang teks bacaan dalam TOEFL-like pada tingkat pemahaman. Sebanyak 29 orang mahasiswa tahun ketiga, Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Bung Hatta dipilih sebagai sampel atau subjek penelitian, dengan menggunakan *total sampling technique*. *TOEFL-Like Test*, yang diambil dari *Practice Exercises for the TOEFL by Sharpe* digunakan sebagai instrument penelitian untuk memperoleh data kuantitatif tentang kemampuan mahasiswa menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan pada tingkat pemahaman sehingga memungkinkan untuk menganalisisnya dengan menggunakan statistik deskriptif. Berdasarkan hasil analisis data, kajian ini menemukan bahwa kemampuan mahasiswa menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan pada tingkat pemahaman tentang teks bacaan pada TOEFL-like masih rendah. Sehubungan dengan hal ini, mahasiswa seharusnya mendapatkan latihan yang lebih banyak lagi dalam menjawab pertanyaan pemahaman pada TOEFL.

**Kata Kunci:** Kemampuan, Pemahaman, Pertanyaan, TOEFL

### Abstract

This research is based on the necessity to take institutional TOEFL test with prerequisite-minimum grade for every student of Bung Hatta University, who is going to finish his/her study. The impact of the implementation of this regulation is to increase the students' English competence. This research aims at describing the students' ability to answer comprehension questions on the texts in TOEFL. The subjects of this research were 29 students chosen by employing convenience sampling technique. TOEFL-Like test, was used to collect quantitative data on students' capability to answer questions that require them to comprehend so that it enables to analyze them by using descriptive statistics. This study revealed that their ability to answer such questions was quite low. Concerning with this, students should get more and more exercises in answering comprehension questions in TOEFL.

**Keywords:** Ability, Comprehension, Classify, Compare, Explain.

### INTRODUCTION

Reading plays a very significant role in language teaching; therefore, this skill should be possessed by students. They can use it to study whatever teaching materials of any subjects they take during their study at university. Moreover, Snow et.al (2017) declare that possessing such skill plays a very extremely important function in developing education, economics and many other aspects of human life. In a nutshell, it is a fundamental requirement of a civilized society.

The skill of reading does not only deals with the involvement of our brains, but it involves memory, thinking, visualizing and understanding. In other words, it is the process of creating meaning from the text (Woolley; 2011). Similarly, Rosari and Mujiyanto (2016) state it

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deals with the capability to understand implicitly, to get the interrelationship among ideas contextually. It is supported by Yusuf and Fauzan (2016) declaring that it is a process of obtaining information and understanding ideas presented in text. Suryanto (2017) states that reading refers to the process of obtaining information and knowledge through written media. In a nutshell, reading is a way to draw and to interpret the information from a text (Grabe & Stoller (2020:5).

Accordingly, reading is included as one of parts of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). As it is well known, TOEFL is regarded as an alternative tool to test someone's capability in English (Mahmud, 2014). According to Jūn (2011), TOEFL is an evaluation tool of the English education provided at the school by analyzing students' scores and determining their development of English proficiency. It is supported by Mufidah (2014) stating that at college degree, someone's capability in understanding English can be tested using TOEFL, and his/her capability is shown by score; 310 to 420 is categorized as elementary level, 420-480 as low intermediate level, 480-520 as intermediate level, and 525-677 as advanced level (Sharpee; 2015). However, certain institutions usually modify the classification of the score as it is stipulated in their own regulation.

This test is officially applied in all over the world in three formats: Paper-Based Test (PBT), The Computer-Based Test (CBT), and The Internet-Based Test (IBT) (Alek et al, 2019) (Alek et al, 2019). PBT consists of three sections; Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension (Zuhayana; 2018, and Matthiesen; 2017). Many colleges or institutions use this test to see their student's capability in English; therefore, the validity of their grade is only accepted locally, not internationally. Then, CBT is a standard test of English academic test administered by using computer since the 1970s (Yao, 2020), and it is an international test for evaluation and assessment in English language proficiency by using computers as media (Hakim; 2019). CBT TOEFL consists of four formats; adaptive listening, adaptive structure, reading comprehension and writing. The range score for adaptive listening, adaptive structure, and reading comprehension in CBT TOEFL is 0-300, while for writing is 0-6 (Airin & Power, 2018: 11). Nowadays, IBT as the newest type has replaced the position of the formers. It tests the test taker's ability to use English effectively in academic settings (ETS, 2017: 4). The score of each section of IBT ranges from 0 to 30, so its maximum score is 120.

As discussed previously, one of the three sections in TOEFL deals with reading comprehension. It measures someone's capability to comprehend and analyze reading texts on various topics (Rogers, 2011) with fifty questions (ETS, 2017). Questions related to reading comprehension in TOEFL are constructed by following one the six levels of thinking (remember, comprehension, application, analysis, examination and creation) in reading comprehension elaborated by Bloom's Taxonomy; that is comprehension question. Understanding or comprehending is meant when someone is able to construct meaning from instructional messages on the text. The cognitive processes in the category of this level include such keywords as compare, contrast, demonstrate, interpret, explain, extend, illustrate, infer, outline, relate, rephrase, translate, summarize, show, and classify.

Some studies related to this research are as follows. Study conducted by Girsang (2019) revealed that students' interest in reading has become the main factor making them unable to do TOEFL test as it is. Then, Kurniawan' study (2020) revealed that students of English Department Universitas Negeri Padang demonstrated poor ability in comprehending TOEFL reading test. Another study conducted by Mahendra (2020) found that students had difficulty in finding main idea questions, organization ideas, stated and unstated detail questions, and implied detail question. The next study done by Jaelani (2022) demonstrated that most students demonstrated their disability to get main ideas, references, and the synonym of certain words. Another study conducted by Agustin (2022) found that shows that students' reading skill in doing TOEFL test was poor.

The general objective of this study is to analyze and find out the capability of students to do TOEFL test dealing with reading section on comprehension questions. Furthermore, it is aimed to describe;

- 1) the capability of students to do TOEFL test dealing with reading section on comprehension questions requiring to classify.

- 2) the capability of students to do TOEFL test dealing with reading section on comprehension questions requiring to compare.
- 3) the capability of students to do TOEFL test dealing with reading section on comprehension questions requiring to explain.

## METHOD

This study used descriptive research design. Loeb, et al. (2017) state that descriptive analysis is a fundamental component of a research process because of its role in helping the researchers to observe phenomena and in identifying research questions based on what has been observed. It is supported by Refnita (2018) declaring that to answer questions relating to the current status of the subject being studied, descriptive research can be used to gather the intended data. Similarly, Arikunto (2014) says to find out the current status of phenomena, that descriptive design can be used. It is used to get information and a clear picture of the social condition. In a word, the goal of descriptive study is to gather, accumulate and describe data, aimed to explain and predict symptoms based on the data obtained in the field. Twenty nine students became the subjects of this study and they were selected using total sampling technique. Twenty nine subjects selected using convenient sampling technique were involved in this research. Data of this research were gathered by utilizing TOEFL-Like test, modified from *Practice Exercises for the TOEFL* by Sharpe (2015). It consisted of thirty items, and each type of question (classify, compare and explain) has 10 questions provided with multiple choice (A, B, C, and D). Descriptive statistics is used to analyze data in order to find mean score, standard deviation and to classify students based on their ability to answer comprehension question in TOEFL. The flowchart of this research is presented in the following figure.

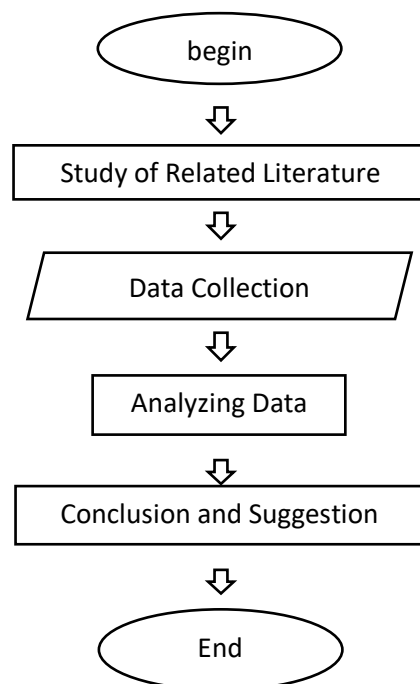


Figure 1: The Flowchart of Research Steps

TOEFL test has been thoroughly designed and tested by experts in the fields of language and measurement. Its development and validation process involves various steps to ensure the questions meet the standards for accuracy, consistency and validity. To estimate the reliability of the instrument using the Rulon's formula (1939), the variance of the difference between the first and second halves is firstly calculated before calculating the total variance. The Rulon's formula for estimating reliability is as follows.

$$r_i = 1 - \frac{V_d}{V_t}$$

Where :

$r_i$  = instrument reliability

$V_t$  = total variance or total score variance

$V_d$  = variance difference

$d$  = score in the initial half minus the score in the final half

After calculating the collected data by using the formula as previously mentioned, it was found the reliability index of the instrument used in this study was 0.92.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As discussed previously, data on students' ability to answer comprehension questions were gathered by giving TOEFL-like in the form objective test with four alternatives. After analyzing the collected data, this study demonstrated score 80 was the highest score obtained by the students, and score 20 was the lowest one. In addition, It was found the average score was 41,26 and standard deviation was 20,90. The finding on students' ability to answer comprehension questions was classified into high, moderate and low one, and the percentage of students whose ability fall into each of such classifications is clearly depicted in Chart 1.

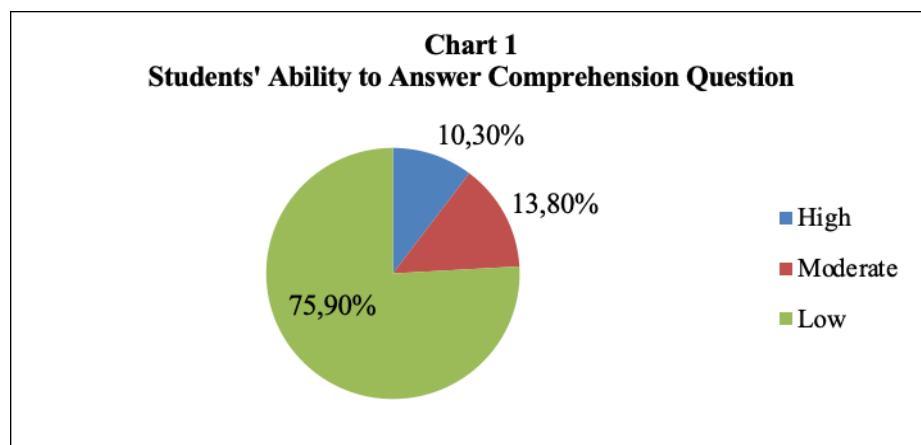


Figure 2. students' ability to answer comprehension question

The result of analyzing data on student's capability to answer comprehension questions that make them have to categorize, to compare and to explain showed that more than half of students had low ability for each category. Even for category to explain, most of them had low ability. To make clear, Table 1 below presents the number of the percentage of the students having bright, average and low capability for each category.

Table 1. Student's Capability to do TOEFL like to Classify, to Compare and to Explain

No	Classification of Ability	Percentage of Students by their Capability to		
		Classify	Compare	Explain
1	High	0%	24,10%	10,30%
2	Moderate	41,4 %	6,90 %	6,90 %
3	Low	58,6 %	69,00 %	82,80 %
	Total	100%	100%	100%

As discussed previously, the finding of this study indicated that there were still many students who were still unable to do TOEFL like on comprehension questions. This is in line

with what Kurniawan (2020) had found in one of his researches in which the students demonstrated their poor comprehension on reading texts. That study shows significantly that more than half students still had problems in comprehending any passages that they read in it.. According to Febriani (2019), the difficulties of the reading comprehension process might be related to motivation, background knowledge, the lack of reading strategies, or language knowledge. As well-known, comprehending or understanding is meant when someone is able to construct meaning from instructional messages. As a matter of fact, comprehension question is well known as the steps in interpreting ideas from certain several forms of communication or action such as interpretation and classification. Therefore, the test takers should have deepen their understanding about the key words dealing with comprehension questions used in TOEFL reading comprehension texts.

Even this study revealed that 82.80 of students have lack of competence to give the correct answers for questions requiring them to provide suitable explanation. As a matter of fact, these kinds of question require the readers to identify two things they are similar or different., and to imply an objective by depicting relative values, by leading toward the good characteristics whether they are the same or different as well as to make a concept by explaining clearly or explicitly, modeling or showing students how it is done. It means, in the category of understanding level, there is a cognitive process; interpretation, exemplification, classification, summarization, infer, comparison, and explanation (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001: 70). Furthermore, Anderson (2001) states this kind of question requires the test takers to make concept by explaining clearly or explicitly, modeling or showing how it is done, and providing guided practice where they get the hang of the concept.

## CONCLUSION

In accordance with what have been previously discussed, it can be concluded that more than half of students had low ability, some had moderate ability, and only few of them had high ability to answer comprehension question in TOEFL. However, there was wide gap between those demonstrating bright capability and those demonstrating weak capability. It is indicated by standard deviation of their score. Looking at the mean and standard deviation, a simple statement can be stated that capability of subjects of this study in doing TOEFL like on comprehension questions was still low. Relating to this, the students are suggested to study much harder as well as to practice their capability in answering comprehension questions.

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