PROBLEMS WITH SECTION TWO TOEFL PREDICTION TEST

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine (1) the difficulties students faced in Section 2 of the TOEFL Prediction Test, as well as (2) why they thought particular subjects were challenging. In this study, a mixed-methods design was employed. Thirty students from different departments at Pamulang University became the test sample to determine difficulties faced by the students. Semi-structured interviews with the five low-performing participants who recorded the most errors on the test to explore the reasons. Results indicated reduced clause (20%) was the most difficult questions to students, followed by subject-verb agreement (13%), parallel structures (13%), comparisons (13%), pronouns (9%), and coordinating conjunctions (9%). It was also found Part B to be more difficult than Part A because it was harder to spot the mistakes in a sentence than it was to complete the sentence from multiple choices. Additionally, the results also revealed that reasons affecting the difficulties in answering the topics namely lack of knowledge and preparation, time management, and lack of vocabularies. Therefore, TOEFL preceptors and instructors are strongly prompted to focus on the six topic study exercises with the highest error percentage, and to train students with various exercises in order to get used to the actual test.

Keywords: *Structure, TOEFL prediction test, written expression*

INTRODUCTION

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a test to assess nonnative speakers' English competence (Andrade et al., 2014). Furthermore, there are more than five thousand universities, colleges and institutions with license in about ninety countries accepting TOEFL scores. In Asia, the use of English and spread of English proficiency test, TOEFL, has rapidly grown and it bring out the global phenomenon (Abboud & Hussein, 2011). Consequently, it results in English to be more broadly used and prominent and seen as prominent language in Asia (Kirkpatrick, 2011). In line with this TOEFL still becomes essential in several fields up to now. In educational circle specifically in higher education level it is used as one of the requirements to enroll thesis defense, and college admission. Moreover, it becomes one of the courses to take in several institutions. Finding the facts, it is urgent to prepare the learners to comprehend and cope with the difficulties in taking the TOEFL test. By mastering TOEFL the learners can have good knowledge of English and chance to carry on their study either domestically or overseas.

TOEFL offers computer and paper-based testing. In many countries both types of TOEFL become popular international testing. The computer-based test (CBT) is provided on a computer and the paper-based test is provided in paper. Besides, TOEFL is also available on Institutional Testing Program specifically for students with intermediate or advanced English level. The TOEFL test has several sections: Listening, Structure and Writing, Reading and Writing. If the TOEFL test is a paper-based test (PBT), the writing part can be omitted, but a computer-based

test (CBT) requires writing. Both formats of his TOEFL test are official and available for students to take. (Liu, 2014) states that the differences are only in range. Joint institutions he can use PBT, but CBT is recognized internationally.

The second part of the TOEFL exam, Structure and Written Expression, focuses on written English. This section is divided into two parts: written expression part B and structure part A, where participants have 25 minutes to respond to 40 questions in total. Test takers choose A, B, C, or D for each of the 15 multiple-choice questions in Part A, and there are 25 questions in Part B. In part B, participants are faced with an error analysis problem on each sentence.

According to Philips (2001), at least ten major topics are divided into the structure and written expression sections: subject-verb agreement, verb tense agreement, word forms, reduced clauses, connectors, gerunds, and infinitives, comparisons, clause formation, parallel structure, and redundancy. Singular subjects must agree with singular verbs, and plural subjects must agree with plural verbs in a scenario known as subject-verb agreement. Participants are asked to identify errors in these agreements. Subject-Verb agreement means the tenses are consistent within a sentence. A connector is a word that connects two words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. It can be categorized into three types: Prepositions, conjunctions, transitions. Participants are tested to recognize the correct use of words, phrases, clauses, or sentence conjunctions. Comparisons use adjectives and adverbs to express the degree of contrast. It is also known as comparative and superlative. Participants are asked to find the correct comparison to show similarity between different things in the sentence.

In Universitas Pamulang, the TOEFL prediction test is used as one of the requirements for graduation. This college has set a minimum score for all the departments, diploma and undergraduate level non-English major with a minimum score of 311 and English major students with minimum score 475. However, most students did not achieve that score, especially non-English major students. They have difficulties in all sections of the TOEFL test, especially in section two, structure and written expression. It is caused by lack of understanding grammatical rules. In addition, other causes of having difficulties faced by the students in section two of TOEFL are lack of basic skill of English grammar, less practice, motivation and students' personal character (Mahmud, 2014).

Several studies have revealed problems faced by students taking the TOEFL test. The structure and written expression issues that 15 Indonesian EFL students encountered when responding to a TOEFL test were explored in a study by Akmal et al., (2020) at the Department of English Language Teaching, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry in Aceh. The findings indicate that written questions are more challenging to respond to than structural inquiries. The findings also indicated a number of elements that were recognized as contributing to these issues, including poor time management, a lack of practice, lack of grammar, a lack of vocabulary, and low self-confidence. Moreover, (Ananda, 2016) analyzed the difficulty of English-major students, the structure and written expression difficulties of Indonesian EFL students in answering the ITP TOEFL test at two different universities. This study found that the written expression questions are the most difficult to answer compared to structural questions. Furthermore, (Fitria, 2021) examined student performance in part A and part B of the section two TOEFL prediction test. As a result, students agreed that Part B, written expression were the most difficult tests, and argued that learning grammar was essential.

Several of the previous research above focuses on examining the problems faced by English major students when taking the TOEFL test. However, there are gaps in all question types in each section of the test (Listening, Structure and Writing, Reading) where questions have not yet been explored in detail. Thus, this study fills in the gap by using participants from various majors in Universitas Pamulang. Therefore, this current study seeks to identify (1) the difficulties students faced in Section 2 of the TOEFL prediction test and (2) the reason why they consider those topics were challenging.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"The Test of English as a Foreign Language" (TOEFL) is a globally recognized standardized test. TOEFL itself has different types such as Paper-based test, computer-based test, and internet-based test. (Weiner & Braun, 2013) pointed out that TOEFL is a way to assess an individual's ability, familiarity or achievement in a specific field, namely, listening, structure, writing and reading comprehension. However, this study only focuses on the second part of the Structure and Written Expression section of the TOEFL Prediction test.

Structure and Written Expression

The second component of the TOEFL exam that concentrates on written English is called "Structure and Written Expression." There are two components to this section: Test takers have 25 minutes to respond to all 40 questions in sections (A): Structure and (B): Written Expression. 15 multiple-choice questions in Part A are marked with the probable choices A, B, C, and D as part of sentence completion, whereas 25 questions are in Part 2. Each sentence in the second section of the test will include questions of the error-analysis. There are at least 10 key topics, namely "subject-verb agreement", "verb tense agreement", "word forms", "reduced clause", "connectors", "gerund and infinitive", "comparisons", "clause-formation", "parallel structure", and "redundancy" (Philips, 2001).

Structure

The response that best completes the sentence must be selected by the test-takers. These statements are mentioned along with their responses (Philips, 2001).

Example:

The boy ------- going to the movies with a friend .

   A. He is
   B. He always was
   C. Is relaxing
   D. Will be

The example above shows that the sentence has a subject (the boy) and it needs a "verb". Due to the subject of the phrase, choices A and B are inappropriate. Choice C is also incorrect because of unnecessary extra verb relaxing. Therefore, D is the correct answer (Philips, 2001).

Written Expression

The test takers will notice that there are four choices marked in each sentence. To ensure that the sentence is accurate, they must identify the one underlined option that has to be corrected. For instance:

<div align="center">

"The four string on a violin are tuned in fifths".

   A   B   C D

</div>

So that, the right respond is B (Philips, 2001).

METHOD

The research applied a mixed-methods design in which the data were attained by employing tests and a moderately structured interview (Popa et al., 2020). To analyze the sore of TOEFL test, a modest quantitative approach was employed and it can be characterized as design of descriptive statistics (Brown & Bailey, 2008; Larson-Hall & Plonsky, 2015; Roever & Phakiti, 2017). In this research tests were spreaded to thirty participants in order to gain the most complicated topics in structure and written expression. The participants of this research were randomly chosen from various departments in Pamulang University. The nethermost score of TOEFL for the requirement of university graduation in non-English department students was 311 and 475 for English department students. The test contained forty questions, 15 structure questions in part A and 25 written expression questions in part B. the participants had 25 minutes to answer those 40 questions. For the reason that interviews are mostly employed in qualitative research, it is permissible to apply any qualitative strategy (Fossey et al., 2002). (Fontana & Frey, 2000) see interview as personal talk intended to gain and create significant data requiring to be collected and

analyzed. In this study moderately structured interview was employed to know why the subject was considered complicated for them and it was conducted with five students with the nethermost scores in section two TOEFL prediction test. Moderately structured interview permitted the interviewee to reveal their notions with their own words and can serve trustworthy and proportional qualitative data (Grinsted, 2005).

Several stages of data analysis were performed. For the first instrument, namely the test, the researcher started by checking the answers provided by the test takers. Afterwards, the answers were classified into correct and incorrect answers. Then, the researcher counted the percentage of the errors of every single topic applying formula from Sudjiono (Sudjiono, 2010):

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\%$$

Description:
"P = error percentage for every topic
 f = the number of incorrect answers for every topic
 N = total number of incorrect answers"""

Data from the interviews were analyzed by coding. As (Miles & Huberman, 2013) stated, "codes are labels or tags used to assign units of meaning to descriptive or inferential data gathered throughout the course of research". In this study, open coding interview data were analyzed. It was started by typing the transcript of the interview, which was recorded on audio. The participants' information is then obtained from the data. The information is then coded, categorized by topic and interpreted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings
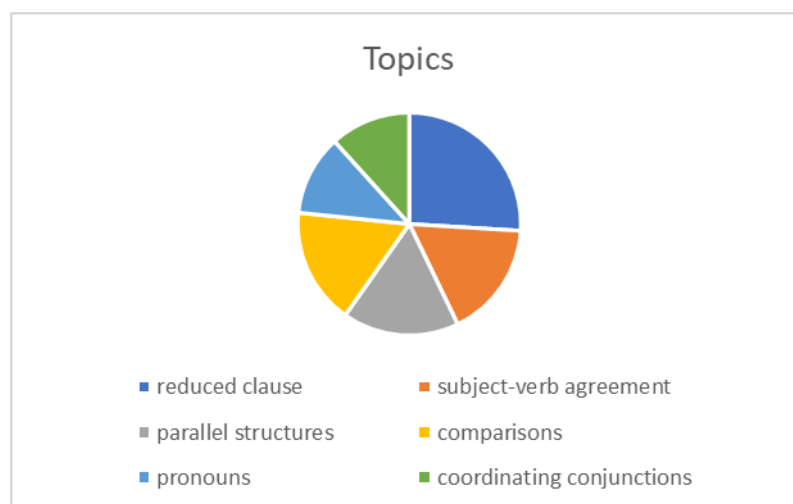The test results are represented in the following figure.

Figure 1. The topics with the highest frequency of errors

The six issues with the top error percentage for every topic are depicted in Figure 1. Students get it harder when a topic has a higher percentage of errors. The foremost topic with the highest error percentage was "reduced clause" reaching (20%). It means that "reduced clause" is considered as the most difficult topic for students, followed by "parallel structure" (13%). In addition, the topic "pronouns" (13%) was the topic in the third stage of error percentage, while, "subject-verb agreement" is in the fourth stage with (13%) of all numbers of errors. Meantime, the rest two topics were "comparison" and "coordinating conjunction", each of which received (9%), respectively.

Factors Affecting the Difficulty of English Learners Answering the Structure Section of the TOEFL Test.

The details of interviews with five participants are described below. The participants were chosen based on their lowest test scores. It was conducted to explore why the students struggled to answer the structure and written expression section of the TOEFL test. Based on the interview results, there are a number of elements that can affect how hard it is for English language learners to understand part A, structure and part B, written expression.

Lack of knowledge and preparation

The interview results showed that most students stated that they did not completely understand grammar so they found it difficult to answer questions in section 2 of the TOEFL prediction test. Here are the comments:

"I don't really understand grammar, what should I look for in the questions in the structure and written expression section. I also lack of practice so I'm not familiar with the questions". (P2)

If I study in class with the lecturer, I understand, but when I take the exam, I'm confused about how to do it. (P3)

"In my opinion, the most difficult part is part B, written expression because we have to find the wrong answer, not the right one. I'm having a hard time determining which error is in this sentence". (P5)

Most of the participants agreed that the most difficult question was in part B, written expression. They perceived why they got low scores due to a lack of knowledge in grammar and lack of exercises. Based on the answers, it can be concluded that practice is crucial for the test takers in preparing TOEFL exam.

Limited Time

"Hmmm...in my opinion the most difficult part is part B because we need time to analyze what went wrong in each question but the time is very limited so many numbers cannot be done due to running out of time". (P1)

"There are many questions and the time is very limited. In my opinion, part B is the most difficult because there are a lot of questions and very limited time. We're still working on some numbers and the time suddenly over". (P4)

Based on the results of the interviews, it can be said that students are not used to managing time to adjust the number of questions that must be done with the time available. Because of that, most of them are short of time, so many numbers are not done.

Lack of vocabularies

"I think all the questions in section 2 TOEFL were difficult because we have few vocabularies, so that we did not understand the sentences in the questions. It will be easier if we were familiar with the vocabularies". (P1)

"I felt grammar was hard to understand and I have lack of vocabularies. Then, I could not understand the sentence sometimes". (P2)

"What I found difficult in answering section 2 TOEFL was I did not really understand the questions because I thought vocabularies appearing in TOEFL was harder than the commonly used vocabularies". (P5)

Based on the interview results above, the participants had difficulty in terms of lack of vocabulary. The participants emphasized the of vocabularies used on TOEFL test more difficult than those used in the common material.

Discussion

Based on the results of the test and interview previously conveyed, it is able to be elucidated that six most difficult topics for students are (1) reduced clause, (2) subject-verb agreement, (3) parallel structure, (4) pronoun, (5) comparison, (6) coordinating conjunction. These findings are supported by (Putra, 2020) who reported that three of the 10 primary items examined in the structure and written expression subtest are the "reduced clause", "parallel structure", and "format of negation".

Firstly, discussion of how participants' TOEFL test difficulty levels are classified, the factors that contribute to test difficulty for participants are further upon. The shortage of grammar practice, particularly

for the TOEFL test, was the first major issue affecting English language learners' difficulty. When they decided to take the TOEFL test, they claimed that they had not studied for the exam well. They didn't study or practice before taking the test. (Putwain, 2009) complemented the findings by noting that practice is necessary to familiarize students with the test questions so they will know how to prepare for the exam. All participants admitted that they lacked of grammar knowledge or proficiency. They also claimed that although they were familiar with the idea of grammar, they were unable to solve TOEFL problems when they were given them.

Moreover, the next factor is time management or limitation. Participants admitted that they ran out of time before they could respond to those questions. They admitted that the time allotted for them to select the answers to 40 questions in 25 minutes was quite constrained. They should therefore practice time management skills before the test. The findings were consistent with those of (Hampp et al., 2021), who found that students have trouble taking tests since there is not enough time. It was explained that the kids would have performed better and passed the test if they had extra time (Hampp et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a lack of language is the third issue that is contributing to the factors affecting difficulty in section two TOEFL prediction test. Vocabulary, according to all participants, was essential for understanding the question. The participants were unable to respond to the questions because they misunderstood the questions' questions. The questions also included a lot of unfamiliar words. Vocabulary is regarded as an essential tool for second and foreign language learners and development (Song & Ma, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the results obtained from the tests and interviews, it is able to be deduced that the most difficult matter in section 2 of TOEFL prediction test are reduced clauses, subject-verb agreements, parallel structures, pronouns, comparisons, and coordinating conjunctions. Furthermore, students stated that several factors causing difficulties in some of the topics above were a lack of knowledge of grammar and a lack of practice so that some of the participants did not know what to do on these questions. In addition, poor time management was also a complaint for the students, they stated that they lacked of time to work on the questions in part 2 so they could not finish until the last number. Finally, the lack of vocabularies is the factor that is considered as causing them fail to answer the questions properly. It can be concluded that if students practice a lot on the questions, they can automatically manage their time well and get used to the vocabulary that often appears in section 2 TOEFL prediction questions. Therefore, students should be given more training and more practice questions. This is implemented to strengthen students' understanding of the TOEFL test, especially the material appearing in the Structure and Written Expression section. In addition, institutions are expected to be able to provide modules that contain materials and examples of TOEFL questions to facilitate students in understanding difficult topics properly.

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