Exploring the Indonesian Nursing Students' Difficulties in Answering the TOEFL Prediction Test

Dedi Jasrial[1]*, Wisma Yunita[2], Ade Sissca Villia[3]
1,2 Universitas Bengkulu
Jl. WR. Suptratman, Bengkulu 38371, Indonesia
1 dedijasrial92@gmail.com*; 2 wisma.yunita@unib.ac.id
3Poltekkes Kemenkes Bengkulu
Jl. Indragiri No 3, Bengkulu 38225, Indonesia
3 villiaadesissca@gmail.com
* Corresponding author

Abstract

Many EFL students have problems doing the TOEFL test so their score results are still under the minimum score. This study aims to explore nursing students' difficulties in answering the TOEFL questions. This study was a descriptive-quantitative study that involved fifty-one nursing students. The data were gathered by using a questionnaire in the form of Google forms. The data were analyzed quantitatively by calculating the mean score of each item of the questionnaire. The results revealed that the level of difficulty experienced by the students in answering the questions on the TOEFL test was in a high category. The most difficult question faced by students in the listening comprehension section was in terms of understanding the speakers' expressions in the long talks. Furthermore, understanding how to simplify a long sentence to a short one was the most difficult question in the structure and written expression section. Moreover, understanding the intent of the passage even though it is stated or unstated was responded as the most difficult question to answer in the reading comprehension section. In brief, the difficulties faced by nursing students show that their English proficiency is still slow. The English lecturer/ instructor should find a more suitable method or technique for teaching English so that students will have better English proficiency and can successfully do the TOEFL test.

Keywords: English proficiency, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, structure and written expression, TOEFL test.

Introduction

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is one of the several kinds of proficiency tests that have been used by universities all over the world for the sake of graduation standards, passing an English program, and so on. Moreover, it aims to assess someone's writing ability required in an academic setting, while its rating scale scores the overall quality of the writing based on (a) development, (b) organization, and (c) the appropriate use of grammar and vocabulary (Educational

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Testing Service, 2007; Kim, 2019). In Indonesia, as stated by Alek et al. (2019), the TOEFL test is used by most universities as a tool to measure students' English proficiency level and as one of the graduation requirements for university students or college students. Each university or college has its standard score.

TOEFL test has some sections, namely listening, structure and written expression, reading, and writing. The writing section can be omitted if the TOEFL test is in the form of a Paper-Based Test (PBT), while it is needed for a Computer-Based Test (CBT). Both forms of TOEFL tests are official and acceptable to be taken by students. Heffernan (2006) mentioned that the difference is the scope of its use only; congruent institutions can use PBT, while CBT can be recognized internationally.

In the Health Polytechnic of Kemenkes Bengkulu, the TOEFL test is used as one of the requirements for graduation. This college has set a minimum score for all the departments (e.g., diploma and undergraduate level) with a minimum score of 400. However, most of the students did not achieve that score, especially the nursing students. They have difficulties in all sections of the TOEFL test. This condition shows that the nursing students' English proficiency is still low. In contrast, Murray (2016) stated that having good English proficiency is important for students, and it will help them to find a better opportunity in job hunting, promotion, get higher salaries, and school admission. This statement is in line with the nursing students' educational background who will work as a nurse at hospitals or health clinics in the future. For example, working as a nurse at an international hospital or hospital in a foreign country, they need English to communicate with patients. To prove their English skills, it is indicated in the TOEFL score. Thus, the nursing students' problems on the TOEFL test should be uncovered to solve their difficulties when taking the TOEFL test.

Several studies have revealed the students' problems on the TOEFL test. First, Ananda (2016) investigated the twenty-six Indonesian EFL students' difficulties with structure and written expression in answering the ITP TOEFL test at two different universities (Syiah Kuala University and the State Islamic University Ar-Raniry) in Aceh. The results show that the written expression question is the most difficult to answer than the structure questions. It was due to finding an error in a sentence being harder than completing a sentence from a multiple choice. Second, Nurhayati and Nehe (2016) analyzed the English students' difficulties and strategies used in answering the TOEFL test questions in STKIP Setia Budhi, Indonesia. This study revealed that the students have difficulties in understanding idioms in listening, the question of noun forms in structure and written expression, and reference questions in reading comprehension are the most difficult question types. Third, Devira and Makhroji (2016) surveyed the students' difficulties in answering the TOEFL questions. This study involved thirty students from five faculties at Samudera University, Aceh. The findings of this study revealed 60% of students had difficulty answering the TOEFL test, and the questions in the reading section were regarded as the most difficult for them. It happened because they have fewer basic English skills, no TOEFL preparation, and students' perceptions.

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The previous studies above only focused on investigating the non-nursing students' problems doing the TOEFL test. However, there is still a gap in which the problems have not been explored yet in detail in each type of question in each section of the test (listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension). Therefore, the present study added ongoing discussions in the previous research and tried to fill the gap. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Which type of TOEFL questions in the listening section seems the most difficult to answer?
2. Which type of TOEFL questions in the structure and written expression section seem the most difficult to answer?
3. Which type of TOEFL questions in the reading section seems the most difficult to answer?

Method
The Design of the Study
The design of this study was descriptive-quantitative research. It is in line with the statement of Creswell (2009) who stated that quantitative research is a research design that aims to test objective theories by examining the relationship among variables and the process of analyzing data using statistical procedures. Thus, this design was used to investigate the nursing students' difficulties in answering the TOEFL prediction test.

The Respondents of the Study
The respondents of this study consisted of fifty-one nursing students who had taken the TOEFL prediction test at the English language center of the Poltekkes Kemenkes Bengkulu in February 2021. Then, they were asked to fill out the instrument to uncover their difficulties in answering the questions of the test. Prior to taking the test; they had taken the TOEFL course for twelve meetings at the language center of the Poltekkes Kemenkes Bengkulu. They were the last semester students in the nursing department. Hence, it is the reason this study involved only fifty-one respondents. It is also in line with the theory of Arikunto (2006) who mentioned that if the number of samples is under 100 respondents, all of the samples must be included in the study. Thus, the sampling technique used in this study was the quota sampling technique.

Instrument of the Study
The instrument of this study was a questionnaire that consisted of twenty-four questions that consisted of three components, namely listening comprehension, structure, and written expression, and reading comprehension. The questionnaire was made in the form of Google Forms. The questionnaire was adapted from Rezkiani (2019). Several items in the questionnaire were modified based on the criteria of the questions in the TOEFL test. The answer options were based on the Likert scale that consisted of five options (e.g., Strongly agree with the score of 5, agree with the score of 4, neutral with the score of 3, disagree with the score of (2),

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and strongly disagree with the score of 1. The validity of this questionnaire was in terms of content validity (expert judgements) and construct validity (tried out). The result of the coefficient score of Aiken's V was 0.836 (Very Worthy) for content validity. The construct validity was tested by using Pearson Product Moment and all items reached an r-count above the r-table (0.2706). It means that all items were valid. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested by using Cronbach Alpha with a score of 0.975 (Reliable).

Data Analysis technique

The data of this study were analyzed quantitatively. The quantitative data were submitted and computed to Microsoft Excel to analyze the descriptive statistics of the items. The frequency and weight scores of the answer in each item were counted. Then, the mean score of each item was calculated. Finally, the mean score of each item was interpreted into five categories; strongly high (4.3-5.0), high (3.5-4.2), moderate (2.7-3.4), not high (1.9-2.6), and strongly not high (1.0-1.8).

Findings and discussion
Nursing Students' Difficulties in the Listening Comprehension Questions

The difficulties on the listening comprehension questions consisted of nine questions. The results of the analysis data are indicated in the table below;

Table 1. The Results of the Questionnaire on the Listening Comprehension Questions

No	Items	Converted Score					Total Score	Mean Score	Inter-pretation
		SA	A	N	D	SD			
1	I find it difficult to recognize the main point of the speaker	55	68	57	8	0	188	3.69	High
2	I find difficulty in guessing unknown words, phrases, and clauses.	55	96	45	2	0	198	3.88	High
3	I find it difficult to cluster/group phrases and clause	45	104	45	2	0	196	3.84	High
4	I find it difficult to understand idioms and phrasal verbs in the dialogue	45	96	48	4	0	193	3.78	High
5	I find it difficult to understand when the speaker speaks too fast	65	92	33	6	1	197	3.86	High
6	I find it difficult to understand the kinds of repetition, rephrasing, and elaboration.	40	88	60	2	0	190	3.73	High

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		SA	A	N	D	SD			
7	I find it difficult to understand the statements in the negative expression	40	84	57	4	1	186	3.65	High
8	I find it difficult to understand the speakers' pronunciation	40	88	60	2	0	190	3.73	High
9	I find it difficult to understand the speakers' expressions in long talks.	60	96	45	0	0	201	3.94	High
	Average							3.79	High

SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

As indicated in Table 1, there were nine items responded by nursing students on the listening comprehension difficulties. The difficulties of those items were in a high category. Among those items, there was one item in the top position of difficulties with a mean score of 3.94, namely item number 9. It was about the difficulty of understanding the speakers' expressions in long talks.

This difficulty is possibly caused by some reasons. First, each talk consists of more than questions that must be answered by nursing students as test-takers. Second, the students seem unfamiliar with the topic that is discussed in each long talk. Third, the students are still unfamiliar with the pronunciation of the narrators. Fourth, the audio is played once so that the students may lose some information that is discussed in the talks. Fifth, the students may lack vocabulary knowledge. Those reasons are in line with the statements of Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) who argue that listening comprehension is the process of understanding speech that concerns several linguistics units (like vocabulary, sounds of phonemes, grammatical structures), context and situation, and content of the speech. In other words, listening comprehension is an activity skill that needs many processes. Sari and Fithriyana (2019) mentioned that the processes in listening comprehension are a process of identifying sounds and a process of catching the idea of the spoken text whether it is stated explicitly or implicitly. Therefore, those processes possibly caused the test-takers such as nursing students to have difficulty understanding the long talks in listening comprehension. They are still not able to catch up and conclude the content of the talks or conversations in the listening section of the TOEFL test.

In addition, other items were also responded as a high difficulty in the listening section of the TOEFL test. It implies that the students' listening ability was still low. The finding of this study is similar to that of Nurhayati and Nehe (2016) who found that students of STKIP Setia Budhi, Indonesia have difficulties in the listening test. However, the students commonly had difficulty understanding idioms. Therefore, to solve this problem, English lecturers and teachers should teach listening comprehensively in the classroom and make their students familiar with the pronunciation of English words and the meaning of those words (Abdulrahman et al., 2018). Hence, the students will find it easy to understand or

catch what the speakers mean so that they can answer the questions on the listening comprehension test.

Students' Difficulties in the Structure and Written Expression Questions
The difficulties in the structure and written expression questions consisted of seven items. The results of the analysis data are indicated in the table below;

Table 2. The Results of the Questionnaire on the Structure and Written Expression Questions

No	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total Score	Mean Score	Inter-Pretation
1	I find it difficult to identify the agreement of subjects and verbs and the connection of words in a sentence	40	76	60	60	0	184	3.61	High
2	I find it difficult to understand sentences that have more than one clause	40	92	51	6	0	192	3.71	High
3	I find it difficult to identify a subject, a verb, and an adjective in a sentence	35	84	51	12	0	188	3.59	High
4	I find it difficult to identify the wrong prepositions in a sentence	30	92	66	4	1	196	3.80	High
5	I find it difficult to identify the wrong connector for a clause in a sentence	30	92	48	8	1	184	3.53	High
6	I find it difficult to answer the question because I do not know all the rules in the structures	30	84	60	8	0	186	3.59	High
7	I find it difficult to understand/know how to simplify a long sentence to a short one	30	96	54	4	6	198	3.84	High
	Average							3.66	High

SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

As presented in Table 2, all of the items on the items of reading comprehension questions were responded by nursing students as a high category. The item experienced as the most difficult for them was item number 7 (I find it difficult to understand/know how to simplify a long sentence to be a short one) with a mean score of 3.84. The difficulty was found in answering the questions in the written expression section. It is possibly caused by the nursing students as test takers still

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lack knowledge of English grammar rules. Another possible reason is time allocation to solve forty questions which means that the test takers have only 37.5 seconds to finish 1 question (Fitria, 2021). It affects the test-takers to simplify the long sentences that have more clauses. The long sentences that have more clauses consist of an adverb clause, adjective clause, and noun clause that function to explain (dependent clause) the main sentence (independent clause). Each of these clauses has a connector, a subject, and a verb. In this case, the nursing students as test takers must be able to identify the main subject and the main verb of the sentence. In this question, the test-takers should have good grammar ability in terms of sentences with more clauses. Therefore, this problem occurred due to poor knowledge of grammar, less concentration, lack of practice, and restricted vocabulary (Tilana et al., 2019). Likewise, Jasrial (2019) claims that students who have limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammar will have difficulty analyzing sentences in English. It includes analyzing the subject and verb agreement, the use of appropriate connectors, prepositions, tenses, and other grammar rules.

In addition, other statements were responded as a high category of difficulty in answering the structure and the written expression section of a TOEFL test. The findings of this study are in line with the study of (Akmal et al., 2020) who found that English students of the Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh have difficulties in the structure and written expression questions in the TOEFL prediction test. Some factors that influenced this case because of the student's lack of practice, grammar incompetence, vocabulary shortage, time management, and low self-confidence. Likewise, Tilana et al. (2019) reported that the students' English grammar competency at the Universitas Bengkulu was poor in the structure and written expression section of the TOEFL test. It happened because the students have a poor understanding of grammar, less focus, lack of practice, and limited vocabulary.

Students' Difficulties in the Reading Comprehension Questions

Reading comprehension was the third question of this study. It investigated the students' difficulties in answering the reading comprehension questions. It consisted of eight items. The results of the analysis data are indicated in the table below;

Table 3. The Results of the Questionnaires on the Reading Comprehension Questions

No	Item	Converted Score					Total Score	Mean Score	Inter-pretation
		SA	A	N	D	SD			
1	I find it difficult to understand the passage because lack of vocabulary	45	88	51	4	1	189	3.71	High
2	I find it difficult to understand the intent of	40	96	51	4	0	191	3.75	High

		SA	A	N	D	SD			
	the passage even though it is stated or unstated								
3	I do not know the strategies for reading comprehension	45	68	60	8	1	182	3.57	High
4	I find it difficult to determine the main idea in the passage	40	72	60	10	0	182	3.57	High
5	I find it difficult to determine the topic of the passage	40	48	84	6	0	178	3.50	High
6	I find it difficult to understand and answer the detailed information in the passage	50	72	54	10	0	186	3.65	High
7	I find it difficult to locate the reference (synonym) which is asked in the passage	45	72	54	10	1	182	3.57	High
8	I find it difficult to draw a conclusion from the information that is given in the passage	40	88	51	6	0	185	3.63	High
	Average							3.62	High

SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

As indicated in Table 3, eight items were responded to by nursing students on the reading comprehension difficulties. The difficulties of those items were in a high category. Among those items, the highest position of difficulty for reading comprehension was item number 2. It was about the difficulty to understand the intent of the passage even though it is stated or unstated with the same mean score of 3.75. This finding indicates that the nursing students as test-takers still have problems understanding the texts so they cannot answer the questions correctly such as understanding the intent of the passage even though it is stated or unstated information. Catching some implied and stated information from a text is done by interpreting or analyzing sentences in a text (Nurjanah, 2018). To do this, the test takers should apply reading techniques such as skimming and scanning so that they can find the answer quickly in the text.

Regarding the finding, the difficulty faced by nursing students is possibly caused by some reasons. The first is a lack of vocabulary knowledge (Chen et al., 2016). In understanding a text, a test taker should master a lot of vocabulary items so that it will be easier to find the information in a text such as the main idea of the text, the synonym and antonym of the words, the stated and unstated information, and conclusion of the text. As emphasized by Nation (2006), language learners need to have more than 6.000 to 7.000 word-family vocabulary for spoken texts and

around 8.000 to 9.000-word family vocabulary for written texts to perform the language effectively without using any comprehension tools. In other words, language learners who have limited vocabulary will get difficulty understanding the texts so they may find it difficult to find the answer to the questions in the test.

Moreover, the test-takers who are categorized as poor readers will not be able to distinguish between effective and poor strategies and their effects on reading comprehension (Nourdad & Asghari, 2017). Therefore, the difficulties faced by nursing students in reading comprehension show that their reading ability must be improved so that they can answer the questions. Reading skill is improved by enabling learners to master critical components of language, including comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling (Al-Mansour & Al-Shorman, 2011; Aldahash & Altalhab, 2020).

The last possible reason is that nursing students lack background knowledge, so they have difficulty understanding the stated and unstated information in the text. Background knowledge is needed by language learners to understand the meaning of the text and be able to conclude the content of the text by using their own words based on their reading (Maasum & Maarof, 2012). It means that they can understand the text better if they can connect the content of the text to their background knowledge. They do not need to take a longer time to read the texts and to find the stated and unstated information in the texts in the TOEFL test.

Although this study has revealed the difficulties faced by nursing students as test takers on the TOEFL test in each section of the test (listening comprehension, structure, and written expression and reading comprehension), this study needs to be continued by further research to investigate another factor that influences the students have the difficulties in answering the questions on the TOEFL test. In addition, this study has limitations in terms of the sample. Therefore, the further researcher also has to involve more respondents from the same department or all departments in a university to get more comprehensive findings.

Conclusion

As argued in the results section, it can be concluded that the nursing students of the Health Polytechnics of Kemenkes Bengkulu have difficulties in answering the questions of the TOEFL test in terms of the listening comprehension section, structure, written expression section, and reading comprehension section. The difficulties that they faced in all items of each section of the TOEFL test were categorized as a high category such as the speakers' expression of long talks (listening comprehension), simplifying the sentences (structure and written expression), and understanding the stated and unstated information in texts (reading comprehension).

The findings of this study give a contribution to English lecturers who teach English courses at the higher education level to be more concerned with improving students' English language skills (listening and reading) and language knowledge (vocabulary and grammar). Consequently, they will have better English proficiency and can successfully do any other type of English test.

ORCID

Dedi Jasrial https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6451-3679
Wisma Yunita https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6039-0448
Ade Sissca Villia -

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