

**ENGLISH STUDENTS' PROBLEM OF TAKING TOEFL TEST  
(A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS AT MATARAM  
UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-2018)**



**A JOURNAL**

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**English Students' Problem Of Taking Toefl Test**  
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**2017-2018)**

*Abstract*

This study entitled “English Students’ Problem of Taking TOEFL Test (A Case Study of English Department Students at Mataram University Academic Year 2017-2018) aims at (1) Identifying problems faced by English department students of Mataram University of taking TOEFL test and (2) Identifying study habits among English students of Mataram university who have high TOEFL score and low TOEFL score. The sample of this research involves 20 students of English education department in the faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mataram University who have taken TOEFL test.

This research utilized descriptive qualitative research. The data were collected through (1) Semi-structure interview which sought information about problems faced by English students of taking TOEFL test. (2) Close ended-questionnaire which sought information of the students’ study habits related to style of study, taking note, learning by experience, reading habit, memorizing and time management.

The result of this of interview show that there are some problems coming up during taking TOEFL test. Based on findings, problems identified are related to lack of English skill and knowledge, poor time management, poor concentration, and the last memory problem. The result of the questionnaire show that there are some different study habits between English students with high TOEFL score and the students with low TOEFL score. Those different study habits are study habits related to focusing on be the best in study, taking note during class lecture, practicing what have been learnt, trying to make correlation between new materials with information with materials have been known, using to do list to keep track of completing academic or personal activities, starting studying for quiz or test at least several days before taking them and having enough time for school and fun.

**Key words :** *English education department students, TOEFL, problems, study habits.*

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of Study**

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test is one of the requirements which has to be fulfilled by English education department students before getting their graduation. This policy is determined by some universities in Indonesia including Faculty of teacher training and education of Mataram University. It requires students to have minimum TOEFL score 500 (the score standard can be different in each university). This policy is made as an English ability standard which is believed that at this level, the students are ready to graduate, study abroad or continue study to the higher level and also for teaching. Hence, taking TOEFL test is needed for graduation.

Although the students of the English education department have learnt English for some semesters, they still have many problems in facing TOEFL test. Thus they cannot reach minimum score which has been targeted. Lack of understanding the test is one of common problems in TOEFL test.

TOEFL problems may also deal with study habits during students' study. One of ways to improve achievement is by having good study habits. Crede and Kuncel (2008) agree with this. They state that study habit and skill should be regarded as the third pillar of academic success (Crede, 2008). Therefore, the successful of taking TOEFL test is affected by students' study habit. Having good time management, self discipline, concentration, memorization are few of many skills of study habits which will help students in being successful in study, including in facing TOEFL test. In TOEFL test, especially in TOEFL test as a prerequisite of graduation for English education department students of Mataram University, there are three English skills which are tested, they are reading comprehension, listening and structure. These three English skills must be learnt, acquired and can be used by the students. In realizing those conditions, it cannot be done in a short time, needed effort, practices and a good study habit. This reveals a fact that students can get high or low score in TOEFL because are affected by their study habit. Thus, it is important to know their study habit to help solving their problems in facing TOEFL test.

## **The Problems of Study**

- a. What are the English students' problems in taking TOEFL test?
- b. What different study habits do students with low TOEFL score and high TOEFL score?

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **Aim of TOEFL test for English Education Department Students**

Test of English as a foreign language or known as TOEFL test is a language test that is used to test people or students' knowledge and use of English language. There are some aims of TOEFL test for English education departments' students. First, as a graduation prerequisite for undergraduate program students; second, TOEFL test is used for admission to graduate program; and the last, TOEFL

#### ***Skills which are tested in TOEFL Test for English Education Department Students***

The sections of the TOEFL test are (Pihillips, 2001) :Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression Reading Comprehension

#### ***The Meaning of TOEFL score 500 for English Department Students***

English education department students of Mataram University who want to get graduation have to reach minimum TOEFL score 500. To understand the meaning of TOEFL score and assessment of students' ability Sujana, Syahrial and Fitriana (2016) make classification of the students' TOEFL score based on non-user category and expert user/near-native speaker. These categories are designed and managed by Oxford Placement test, IELTS band score and LAN, ODA, BC. Based on the categories is found that score 500 because is categorized as competent user of English language. Longman dictionary defines word "competent" as *having enough skill or knowledge to do something to a satisfactory standard*. It means that TOEFL score 500 is a standard for English education department students which have to be reached to become a teacher.

#### **Competent User of English**

Competent user of English must have enough skills of ability in English. There are some language skills which have to be mastered by English education students, they are reading, listening, speaking, , writing and additional skill such as grammar and vocabulary which become successful keys in using language correctly and appropriately.

## **Common Problems in Learning English**

In learning English skills, certainly there are problems which obstruct learning process of students and affect their study result. The students have their own issues but the most common problems which appear among students in learning language are:

a. Less Motivation

Learning English also involves inner motivation to reduce language; complexity instilled in Indonesians' mind Somehow, lacking of motivation turn out to be one of major obstacle for students and can disturb the continuity of language acquisition (Putra, 2015).

b. Lack of Vocabulary

Many students (non-English speakers) need to learn new vocabulary which different from their first language.

c. Lack of grammar or structure understanding of the English language.

d. Pronunciation or the inability to understand or comprehend new words

e. Working Memory

Shehu (2016) states that the learners often complain of the fact that they cannot recall the information they just read and they just learnt.

## **How to be a Good English Learner**

Harmer (2001) elaborates some important things which have to be had and done by English learners to be a good learner. A good English learner should have (Harmer, 2001):

1. Habits which will help students individually or correlatively

Students need to have good habits in increasing their study achievement.

2. Students' motivation

Desire to learn English will give big effect to the study result of the students. Harmer (2001) states that the students who are more highly motivated will learn more successfully than those who are only learning language as a means to an end (for example getting better job).

### 3. Good characteristics learning in classroom

A good learner possesses some or all of the following characteristics such as a willingness to listen, a willingness to experiment, a willingness to ask questions, a willingness to think about how to learn and a willingness to accept corrections.

## **Effective Study Habit in English Learning**

Jacobs and Hyman stated that some successful college students can be generated by students; intelligence, insight and sheer good luck, but a lot of time-unbeknownst to some students that their successful academic can be caused by their study habits. Jacobs and Hyman state study habits of the most successful college students, they are (Jacobs, 2009):

#### a. Good in self-management and time management

One of characteristics of good learning habit of students is good in managing.

#### b. Having good planning

Students who have a good learning habit will have a plan ahead for what to do (make list to do), they also divide up the task and prepare for test.

#### c. Being Persistent and Brave

Good learning habits of successful students are challenging themselves to be better and challenging themselves in trying new things which are good for their study..

#### d. Focusing on their Study

Lynn (2009) in his finding states that successful students have some habits which focus on be the best or number one in their study.

#### e. Learning from experience and proof

The other good learning habit which done by students are they learn from the experience and engage the proof in their learning activities.

There are other some effective learning habits which are done by learners' based on students academic resource centre, the University of Central Florida:

#### a. Style of Study

Every student has different style of study. That style of study can be mentioned as an effective study habit if it can give more positive effect for the students especially for their achievement.

b. Reading

Students with effective study habit in reading will do some activities such as making summary before they start reading by looking information or browsing information of the book, etc.

c. Taking notes

Students who have effective study habit know and understand that having complete note will give more advantage to them. Thus, the students will take note as they read text books, take note during the class, rewrite their note, etc.

d. Memorizing

Study during their personal peak time of energy to increase concentration. The students quiz themselves; say difficult concepts out to loud in order understand them better.

e. Time Management

Students use a calendar book to write down upcoming academic and personal activities.

They use to do list, start studying at least several days before quizzes or tests. They finish their papers, homework or project as soon as they are assigned.

## **Review of Previous Research**

Mahmud conducted study of The EFL Students' Problems in Answering the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) explores the students' problem in answering TOEFL. The subject of her research is the students of graduate program at one state university in Makasar, Indonesia. Findings show that the main problems of the students in answering the TOEFL test are due to several conflicting reasons, such as fewer basic skills, less practice, less motivation, and students' individual differences such as age and social status. In Murni' study focused on the several conflicting reason in answering TOEFL score of the student, there are no explanation about the common problem of major problems of the students during taking TOEFL test.

Ismalia conducted a research entitled “Students’ Problem in Answering TOEFL test”. The focus of her paper is to explore the students’ problems in answering the TOEFL test. The paper is a descriptive study based on in depth semi structured interview and documentation and data sources was taken from students of English Department at STAIN Zawiyah Cot Kala Langsa that had failed or had done TOEFL test more than twice. (Ismalia, 2014). The study also showed that the main problems of the students in answering the TOEFL test were due to several conflicting reasons, such as fewer basic skills, lack of practice, lack of motivation, and students’ individual differences such as age and social status. Thus, the study showed that the students’ efforts to get standard score in TOEFL test is low

### **CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is kind of case study which uses qualitative descriptive method. Merriam (1998) defines characteristic of case study research is the delimitation of the case.

Population of this study was English students of Mataram University semester 9 and above academic year 2017-2018 (morning and evening class). There are approximately 195 students. Arikunto (2002) states that if the subject is less than 100, it is better to take the whole number of population as the subject of the research. However, if the number of population is more than 100, it is suggested to take 10% to 15% or 20% to 25%. In line with this theory, therefore 20 English students were taken as the sample (it is about 10% of the population). The participants of this study are randomly chosen from the English students who have taken TOEFL test.

Methods of data analysis in this study are :

#### **Document Analysis**

First, I met the English students of Mataram University (population), then asked them whether they had taken TOEFL test or not. If they stated that they had taken TOEFL test then asked them to collect their TOEFL certificate to collect reliable data.

## **Interview**

First, the data from interview were recorded and then transcribed in order to facilitate the process of data analysis. Second, the transcribed data was reduced in order to take important parts related to the issues in the study. Then, the reduced data was analyzed in order to know the problems of participants of taking TOEFL test. The data were arranged from the frequent problems into the least problems in a table.

## **Questionnaire**

The data was collected from questionnaire was accumulated and tabulated. First, the data was sorted according to questionnaire items. Second, the data was tabulated by following data's percentage. The tabulated data and the percentage would be presented in a table and arranged from the frequent data into the least data.

## **CHAPTER IV FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The problems faced by the English students presented on the previous section in which those problems are divided into 4 major problems.

1. ***Lack of English Skill and Knowledge*** : This point deals with problem faced by the students in English skill and knowledge. All the respondents stated and mentioned similar statement that they got problem in English proficiency. They explained that they had poor word and sound recognition, had problem in fast speech rate in listening section. They also said that they found unfamiliar words which became obstacle for them in answering the test. Also, they felt difficult in following unfamiliar topic in listening and reading sections, they were confused about the main idea in listening and reading section. A respondent gave statements that they understood words but not the intended message in listening and reading section. In grammar or structure section, some respondents said that they got confused whether the structure answers of the test are correct or not and also could not differentiate among subject, object and verb of sentence
2. ***Poor Time Management*** : This point deals with problems faced by the students in time management. There are 12 respondents who stated that they got problems in time management. They stated that they could not divide their time wisely, therefore when the

time was up; they had not finished the test yet. They also admitted that they focused on the questions without noticing the time and they were not aware about the limitation of time. These problems frequently appear when the participants were facing reading section and listening section.

3. **Poor Concentration** : this point deals with problems faced by students in dealing with their concentration ability. There were 8 respondents elaborated they got problems in handling their concentration problems. When they were answering the test, they could not get any noise because it would break their concentration. As additionally, the students also got problem when they answered the last part test. In reading test, they stated that they could not give 100% of their concentration because of some factors such as feel sleepy, tired or feel bored.
4. **Memory Problem**: this point deal with problem faced by the English students in memorizing. This memorizing issue was disclosed by 3 respondents. From the data of interview found 2 specific problems , there are forgetting words or phrase just heard in listening section and forgetting words or phrase just read in reading section in listening section, when they heard the conversation from recording, they understand with the words or the message of the conversation, unfortunately, they cannot remember 100% of the recording when the recording stopped. Additionally, they gave some advice that it will be better if we can make a small note during listening part in order to help remembering the recording.

Some problems of the findings are similar with the problems in the theory “Common Problems in Learning English”, but in the finding, I found more specific problems which are not explained in the theory. As mentioned before that there are 4 common problems appear in learning English such as less motivation, lack of vocabulary, lack of grammar understanding, pronunciation, and working memory. Pronunciation problem did not appear in finding because there is no speaking part in the TOEFL test (prediction). Less motivation problem is not found in the finding because all of respondents stated that they took TOEFL test because of they had motivation of taking TOEFL test, they wanted to know their English proficiency and also they want to know their TOEFL score, but the most motivation was they needed to get TOEFL certificate.

## Practice Effect

This point related to problem of taking TOEFL test and the TOEFL score of the students. As known, there is a opinion “Practice makes perfect”. The problems which appear in the findings can be stated because the students have less practice. For the students who have taken TOEFL more than three times or until six times, they will feel accustomed to the test and as known that institution which administers TOEFL test prediction sometimes provide same test, thus it can affect the TOEFL score of the students.

## Cheating Damage of TOEFL Test

Cheating is one of problems which affect the result of TOEFL test score. The students with low ability in English skill can get high score in TOEFL test because they do not use their real ability. This issue becomes problems which is hoped can be avoided and prevented by institutions which provide TOEFL test by giving more supervision to avoid this problem.

## Different Study Habits between English Students with High TOEFL Score and Low TOEFL Score

There were 20 samples of English department from Mataram University. Among those samples, 10 students who have reached 500 as the minimum TOEFL score and 10 students who have not reached 500 as the minimum TOEFL score.

From the questionnaire, were found these data :

Aspect/Category	Study Habits	Frequency of Occurrence	
		Students with High TOEFL Score	Students with Low TOEFL Score
Style of Study	Trying to be the best in the study	70%	40%
Taking Note	Taking notes during class lecture	90%	50%

Learning from Experience	Communicating with some people by using English.	40%	10%
	Practicing what have been learnt	50%	10%
Memorizing	Trying to make correlation between new materials with information with materials have been known	60%	40%
Time Management	Using to do list to keep track of completing academic or personal activities	40%	20%
	Starting studying for quiz or test at least several days before taking them.	70%	30%
	Having enough time for school and fun	80%	50%

Those data are concluded by comparing the highest percentage of each study habits between these two types of students.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Conclusion**

From the data analysis and discussion in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that :

1. English students of faculty of teacher training and education of Mataram University faced some problems of taking TOEFL test which related to 4 problems with 15 specific problems. Those problems are lack of English skill and knowledge, poor time management, poor concentration, and the last memory problem.
2. Those problems affected by their study habits. The students with high TOEFL score and low TOEFL score have some significant different percentage of some study habits.

Those study habits related to focusing on be the best in study, taking note during class lecture, practicing what have been learnt, trying to make correlation between new materials with information with materials have been known, using to do list to keep track of completing academic or personal activities, starting studying for quiz or test at least several days before taking them and having enough time for school and fun. Those study habits indicates that the students with high TOEFL score have higher percentage than the students with low TOEFL score.

The findings imply that, English students with high TOEFL score and low TOEFL score have problems of taking TOEFL test, this also was affected by their study habits. They need to improve their study habits, especially related to their reading habits and memorizing in order to diminish their problems of taking TOEFL test. Those two study habits are study habits with least percentage. This indicates why most of the students have problems in reading part of TOEFL test.

For the students with low TOEFL score, they need to have better study habit in learning from experience related to practice English skills because all of students with low TOEFL score have problem related to lack of English skills and knowledge. Students with low TOEFL score also need to improve their study habit related to studying at least 2 hours every day because there is only 10% students with low TOEFL do this study habits. If they provide more time to study, they can learn more and it can give more improvement for their study even when they take TOEFL test.

## **Suggestions**

### **English Students**

- English students should learn and practice more about how to manage their time in answering test and in reading long texts.
- English students should sharpen their knowledge and skills in grammar, listening and reading (English proficiency since they are English education student who need to take TOEFL test as requirement to graduate, and since they will be teaching English)
- English students should enrich their knowledge in dealing with vocabulary.
- should learn how to manage their time in daily activities and in facing a test.

## **Lectures or Educators**

- Lectures or educators should give more materials related to TOEFL test
- Lecturers or educators who teach reading course should improve students reading skills by giving more articles, book, text or journal to read.
- Lectures or educator should give some tips for the students in handling some difficult part of TOEFL test.

## **English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education**

- There should be an improvement in English proficiency subject especially listening TOEFL and reading TOEFL course since these courses are considered important before the students take TOEFL test.
- English department should provide TOEFL test for students in the earlier semester in order that they get information about their English proficiency ability and about the kind of TOEFL test that they will be faced.

## **Recommendation for Further Research :**

This study included 20 English students as sample (English Foreign Language) which used depth semi-structure interview to find English students' problems of taking TOEFL test . However, there is a fact that English students can get TOEFL score 500 after taking TOEFL more than 5 times. Therefore, there is a need to conduct similar study in bigger scale which involves more English students who got score 500 purely because of their real ability, and also adding questionnaire as the instrument to find the English students' problem of taking TOEFL test in order to get more detail and comprehensive data.

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