

## **AN ANALYSIS OF READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES IN TOEFL TEST BY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

**Anita LoviaGirsang<sup>1</sup>**  
Universitas Prima Indonesia

**Fransiska Vanny Guitara Marbun<sup>2</sup>**  
Universitas Prima Indonesia

**Yusri Apriani Margaretha Turnip<sup>3</sup>**  
Universitas Prima Indonesia

**Erikson Saragih<sup>4</sup>**  
Universitas Prima Indonesia

[Anitagirsang88@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>](mailto:Anitagirsang88@gmail.com)

*Submit, 30-11-2019 Accepted, 21-12-2019 Publish, 23-12-2019*

### **ABSTRACT**

This research was conducted with the aim of finding out the difficulties that were felt by high students in answering reading comprehension questions on the TOEFL test. The method used in this research is qualitative method. This research was conducted on high school students who had taken the TOEFL test. From the results of this study it was found that the biggest problem in reading comprehension in the TOEFL test was due to the lack of interest in reading high school students so they would feel bored by seeing the text in front of them and it was still difficult for high school students to find the meaning of the text due to lack of vocabulary, and lack of practice to answer questions related to reading comprehension with the lack of practice, they think that the time to answer questions is not enough. So from the research conducted it is expected to overcome these difficulties, high school students must increase their practice of reading comprehension questions both at home and at the course, and must increase interest in reading and increase vocabulary so that it is easier to work on problems in the reading comprehension section.

*Keywords: reading comprehension, TOEFL*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this era, English is not a strange thing for everyone. Because English is an international language, which is used in all corners of the world. In Indonesia, English has become one of the subjects in the world of education. There are 4 skills in English, currently the TOEFL test is the most internationally recognized

test for measuring a person's level of English (Warfield, *et.al*, 2013). One of which is reading. According to Grabe & Stoller, (2002) reading is a way to draw information from the printed page and to interpret the information appropriately .everyone actually has to master this skill because by mastering this reading skill the message of a text can be conveyed.

To find out how high our English level is, we can take the TOEFL test, because the TOEFL is a standard test used to measure English language proficiency. At present the TOEFL score has become one of the requirements to get a scholarship abroad. so many people who have taken the TOEFL test. In Indonesia, the TOEFL certified internationally is held by the English Language System (ETS) (Mahmud, 2014).). Even now all universities in Indonesia have a TOEFL score to pass and even to get a job TOEFL score has become one of the requirements. The authority of universities set this precondition because they believe that TOEFL is able to evaluate students' ability and skills to understand English in academic tasks (Aliponga, 2013).

Previous research conducted by Febriani *et.al* (2019) this research said that the problems faced by eighth semester students were lack of students' understanding of the text, lack of student background, lack of student reading strategies, which caused students to fail in answering reading comprehension questions on the TOEFL test. Antoni (2014) also said the difficulties experienced by students in interpreting texts, vocabulary restrictions, and time constraints.

Another research was conducted by Octarina (2018) in this research many questions were asked from Deborah Philips TOEFL book. that is, difficulty in finding the main idea, Implied Detail Question, Unstated Detail, Stated Detail Question and Vocabulary question. in this research said that the most difficulty faced by students is when they have to find the main ideas of the text, because of the lack of student vocabulary. then the thing that is most important is to increase the vocabulary.

This research was conducted by making a few changes from previous research that only use research subjects from English education. However, the data in this study were obtained from diverse research subjects ranging from graduates from 2015 to graduates in 2019 who had taken the TOEFL test. So the data obtained is also very diverse because with different majors backgrounds. This is also done to find out the difficulties experienced by students in taking the TOEFL test not only one course, but from various majors.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many experts have defined meaning rather than reading, Sweet & Snow (2003) define reading as a process of constructing meaning from text. There are various techniques in reading as conveyed by Grellet (1998) which are

summarized as; cursory reading, extensive reading, intensive reading, receptive reading, responsive reading.

According to Moat (2011) in reading we must be able to understand the meaning of symbols and be able to create words. Difficulty in reading comprehension is no longer rarely heard because there have been many studies of the biggest problem in reading is to understand the contents of the text. Vogel as cited in Chen & Chen (2015) has said that about 52% of adults with L2 reading comprehension problems had difficulties in learning a foreign language. However, problems also arise because of the low vocabulary of someone, so it is not enough to interpret the contents of a text and do not know the background of a text. Goodman (1979) has said that even the most excellent readers frequently have difficulty to connect what they already know before they read something.

The TOEFL test also contains reading comprehension questions which the TOEFL is test which is usually used to find out a person's ability level, about his English. This test itself is intended for those who do not use English as a mother tongue, or also countries that use English as a foreign language or also their second language. The TOEFL test consists of 4 parts, namely reading, listening, speaking and writing. In completing reading comprehension, there are many problems experienced by high students. As said by Al-Rawashdeh (2010) who conducted research in Jordania universities students which in this study revealed that the TOEFL test was intended for English students, and assumed that the TOEFL test was useless. To solve the difficulties experienced by students, many researchers suggest that universities increase their time in terms of improving reading comprehension.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method, which aims to analyze the difficulties experienced by high school students in answering reading comprehension questions on the TOEFL test. The subjects in this study were high school students from several campuses in Medan and their graduates varied from 2015 to 2019 who had taken toefl tests of 45 people consisting of 27 women and 18 men. With the procedure of collecting data through interviews and filling out questionnaires related to the test toefl specifically in the reading section.

## **FINDING**

In this study, researchers began their research by meeting and contacting people who had taken the TOEFL test, until finally information was obtained from 45 people who had taken the TOEFL test and then the researcher asked matters related to his research. In his research, researchers asked what parts were tested on the TOEFL until finally asking the hardest part in the TOEFL test. Most

people say that when they have to answer a listening section, but most also say when they have to answer a question by having to read text that is very boring. That makes most people do not have time to answer questions because they have run out of time to read the text. Not to mention the vocabulary used in the text including difficult vocabulary so that it must make the head spin around around to understand the meaning and contents of the text.

Lots of information obtained in this study. From 45 people there were 12 people who said they did not like answering questions in the reading section because reading was a very boring thing, especially not our own language. 8 people gave reasons not to like reading comprehension because of lack of reading interest. 15 people said that in answering reading comprehension questions was confusing because it was very difficult to find the meaning, purpose and meaning of the text, 5 people said it was very difficult to answer reading comprehension questions in the TOEFL test because it required a lot of time. So they felt the time given in answering the test was lacking, 2 others said that it was very rare to practice working on reading comprehension questions, and 3 people said that there was not enough money to take the toefl course.

Based on the data found by the researcher, the researcher concludes that the difficulty in answering reading comprehension questions on the TOEFL test is because the participants' lack of interest in reading, the meaning and purpose of the text in reading comprehension questions is difficult to understand, lack of practice and time become one of the difficulties for each participant who follows TOEFL test.

## **DISCUSSION**

Reading is one of the skills in English, so reading and understanding are required to be mastered by every student. as well as in the TOEFL test which has comprehension reading questions. but in reality there are still very many obstacles experienced by students, especially high students in mastering the techniques of solving reading comprehension problems in the TOEFL test. From the results of data collection many high school students still have difficulty answering questions on reading comprehension due to several things. As from the data found due to lack of interest in reading, the meaning of the text is difficult to understand, time to work on the problem is very lacking and lack of practice in working on reading comprehension problems, and the lack of foreign language vocabulary as a second language and not their true culture so that they will only get used to what they often hear and this is the biggest problem in answering TOEFL test questions so it is very difficult to find the main idea of the text.

This is similar to what is expressed (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988) that research on schema theory shows students can fail if they do not have the same

access as the text. Other researchers also argue that cultural background is very influential on what they read (Davoudi & Ramezani, 2014) and incidental vocabulary acquisition (Pulido, 2004).

In his research Mahmud (2014) said that the highest difficulty of high students in answering questions because high students do not have the skills and motivation to read. Difficulties experienced by high students in solving TOEFL test problems become a big problem in the world of education. so it needs a lot of attention and actually the problem of facilities is also one of the supporting factors to increase student motivation to read so that students' reading skills also increase.

So from the research conducted, it is expected to overcome these difficulties. High school students must increase their work on reading comprehension questions both at home and at the course, as well as increasing interest in reading and increasing vocabulary so that it is easier to work on problems in the reading comprehension section.

## CONCLUSION

So from the research conducted it is expected to overcome these difficulties, high school students must increase their practice of reading comprehension questions both at home and at the course, and must increase interest in reading and increase vocabulary so that it is easier to work on problems in the reading comprehension section.

## REFERENCES

- Aliponga, J. (2013). Reading journal: its benefits for extensive reading. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(12), 73-80.
- Al-Rawashdeh, H. (2010). *Difficulties that Face Graduate Students During their TOEFL Preparation Program at Jordanian Universities*.
- Antoni, R. (2014). An analysis on 6th semester students' TOEFL experience at English department of teachers training and education faculty of Pasir Pengaraian University. *Journal Ilmiah Edu Research*, 3(1), 9-16.
- Carrell, P. & Eisterhold, J. (1988). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. In P. Carrell & D. Eskey, (Eds.), *Interactive approaches to second language reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, S. C., & Chen, K. T. (2015). The Use of EFL Reading Strategies among High School Students in Taiwan. *The Reading Matrix*, 15(2), 156-166.
- Davoudi, M & Ramezani, H. (2014). The effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 2(8), 58-71.
- Febriani, D., Elfrida, & Fernandita., J.(2019). Reading Comprehension Problem In Reading Section of TOEFL Test. JAAL, *Journal of Applied Linguistic and Literasi*, 3(2)

- Goodman, K. (1979). The Know-more and the Know-Nothing Movements in Reading: A Personal Response. *Language Arts*, 55(6): 657-663.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Reading*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Grellet, F. (1998). *Developing Reading Skill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mahmud, M. (2014). The EFL students' problems in answering the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): A study in Indonesian context. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(12): 2581 -2587.
- Moats, L. C. (2001). *Teaching reading is rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.
- Oktarina, R. (2018). *Difficult Skills In Reading Section of Toefl Faced by Sixth Semester English Students*.
- Pulido, D. (2004). The Effect of cultural familiarity on incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading. *The Reading Matrix*, 4(4), 20-52. Retrieved December, 21, 2014 from <http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/pulido/article.pdf>.
- Sweet, A. P., & Snow, C. E. (2003). *Rethinking Reading Comprehension*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Warfield, W., Laribee, R., & Geyer, R. W. (2013). Examining results and establishing benchmark data from the TOEFL ITP test. *American Academic & Scholarly Research Journal*, 5(3), 191-198.