

HAMBATAN SISWA DALAM TES TOEFL PADA MAHASISWA JURUSAN BAHASA INGGRIS UNIVERSITAS PGRI SUMATERA BARAT

*Student's Barriers In Toefl Test A Study At English Department Students Of Universitas PGRI
Sumatera Barat*

Supiyati Fatayat^{1*}

Rika Afriyanti²

Herfyna Asty³

^{*123} Universitas PGRI,
Padang, Sumatera Barat
Indonesia

supiyati804@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi kendala yang dihadapi mahasiswa Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat dalam menyelesaikan tes TOEFL, khususnya pada tiga keterampilan utama, yaitu listening comprehension, structure and written expression, serta reading comprehension. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode campuran (mixed methods) dengan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Instrumen penelitian berupa kuesioner dan wawancara yang disebarkan kepada mahasiswa yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data kuantitatif dianalisis dengan menghitung persentase, sedangkan data kualitatif dianalisis melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami kesulitan yang signifikan dalam ketiga aspek keterampilan TOEFL. Pada listening, kendala utama meliputi keterbatasan kosakata, kesulitan memahami percakapan cepat, serta intonasi penutur asli. Pada structure and written expression, mahasiswa menghadapi hambatan dalam memahami aturan tata bahasa yang kompleks dan penggunaan kosakata akademik. Sedangkan pada reading comprehension, kesulitan dominan terletak pada memahami ide pokok, inferensi, serta teks dengan struktur panjang. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa hambatan mahasiswa tidak hanya terbatas pada satu keterampilan, melainkan mencakup keseluruhan aspek akademik bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci:

Kendala
TOEFL

Keywords:

Barriers
Toefl

Abstract

This study aims to identify the barriers faced by students at PGRI University of West Sumatra in completing the TOEFL test, particularly in the three main skills: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. This study uses a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The research instruments consist of questionnaires and interviews distributed to selected students using purposive sampling techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed by calculating percentages, while qualitative data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study indicate that students experience significant barriers in all three aspects of TOEFL skills. In listening, the main challenges include limited vocabulary, barriers understanding fast conversations, and the intonation of native speakers. In structure and written expression, students faced barriers in understanding complex grammar rules and the use of academic vocabulary. In reading comprehension, the dominant barriers lay in understanding main ideas, inferences, and texts with complex structures. These findings confirm that students' challenges are not limited to a single skill but encompass all aspects of academic English proficiency.



Introduction

English has become an international language that plays a significant role in academic, professional, and social contexts. In Indonesia, English proficiency is not only a supporting skill but also a requirement for higher education, scholarships, and employment opportunities. One of the most widely recognized proficiency tests is the *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL), which evaluates students' ability in listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. Universities and institutions commonly use TOEFL scores as a standard for admission and graduation, highlighting its importance for students across disciplines.

Despite its relevance, many students face considerable challenges in achieving satisfactory TOEFL scores. Previous studies indicate that common barriers include limited vocabulary mastery, difficulties in understanding complex grammar structures, and challenges in comprehending long academic texts. Moreover, listening comprehension often becomes an obstacle due to unfamiliar accents, fast-paced conversations, and idiomatic expressions. These problems are further compounded by psychological factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and inadequate preparation.

Considering these issues, it is crucial to investigate the specific barriers faced by students in taking the TOEFL test. This study focuses on English Department students at Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat, aiming to identify the major obstacles they encounter in TOEFL, particularly in listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for both students and educators in designing effective learning strategies to improve TOEFL performance.

The *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL) is an international standardized test developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to measure English proficiency of non-native speakers (Sulistyo, 2001). It assesses essential academic skills, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing, depending on the test version (PBT, CBT, or iBT). TOEFL is widely accepted by more than 11,000 universities and institutions globally (ETS, 2020), making it a key requirement for higher education and professional opportunities.

Research indicates that students often struggle with TOEFL due to both linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Linguistic barriers include limited vocabulary, weak grammar knowledge, and difficulty in recognizing main ideas and inferences in reading texts (Philips, 2003; Mahmud, 2014). Listening comprehension also poses challenges, as students must adapt to native speakers' speed, intonation, and idiomatic expressions (Hamouda, 2011). Non-linguistic factors such as test anxiety, lack of preparation, and low motivation also significantly affect performance (Mahmud, 2014; Wati & Ridha, 2019).

Several studies have highlighted the challenges faced by students in TOEFL preparation. Abboud and Hussein (2011) reported that EFL students encounter persistent barriers in listening and structure sections, limiting their TOEFL performance. Similarly, Sulistyo (2009) emphasized the complexity of

structure and written expression questions, which demand a strong understanding of grammar. More recent studies (Fitria & Prastiwi, 2020; Susylowati et al., 2022) also confirmed that difficulties in vocabulary mastery and inadequate test strategies contribute to low TOEFL scores among Indonesian students.

Based on the reviewed literature, this study focuses on three major skills tested in TOEFL: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. Barriers in these areas can be attributed to both internal factors (language proficiency, vocabulary, motivation, anxiety) and external factors (teaching strategies, learning resources, test format). Identifying these barriers is essential to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' challenges and to design interventions that enhance their TOEFL performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine students' barriers in the TOEFL test. The participants were 33 English Department students of Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat from the 2021 cohort, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire based on the Guttman scale (Yes/No) distributed via Google Form, focusing on three main TOEFL components: listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension, as well as semi-structured interviews with selected students to explore their experiences in depth. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the frequency and percentage of difficulties encountered, while qualitative interview data were examined through thematic analysis by coding, categorizing, and interpreting patterns such as lack of preparation, limited vocabulary, grammatical challenges, and test anxiety.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that English Department students at Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat faced significant barriers across all three sections of the TOEFL test. In the **Structure and Written Expression** section, most students struggled with sentence completion, error identification, and understanding complex grammatical structures, indicating a limited mastery of advanced grammar rules. In the **Reading Comprehension** section, students reported difficulties in identifying main ideas, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary in context, which reflects insufficient reading strategies and vocabulary mastery. In the **Listening Comprehension** section, challenges included limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding fast-paced conversations, and problems with accents and idiomatic expressions, showing that auditory processing and exposure to authentic English input remain inadequate. These results are consistent with previous studies (Mahmud, 2014; Hamouda, 2011) highlighting grammar, vocabulary, and listening as persistent barriers in TOEFL performance. Moreover, qualitative interviews revealed additional non-linguistic factors such as test anxiety, lack of preparation, and low confidence, which further hindered students' performance. Overall, the findings suggest that both linguistic competence and psychological

readiness play crucial roles in determining students' TOEFL outcomes, reinforcing the need for integrated teaching strategies that combine language skill development with test-taking practice and stress management.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that students experience various barriers in facing the TOEFL test, particularly in the aspects of grammar, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension. In the grammar aspect, the main barriers lie in understanding complex sentence structures, the use of tenses, and subject-verb agreement. In the reading comprehension aspect, barriers arise when students have to understand long sentences, limited vocabulary, and difficulty in drawing conclusions from the text. Meanwhile, in the listening comprehension aspect, the biggest barriers are understanding diverse accents, foreign idioms, and the speaker's intentions that are not directly stated. Strategies used by students to overcome these barriers include intensive practice, paying attention to context, using keywords, and trying to improve vocabulary. Thus, it can be concluded that the main factors influencing students' low achievement on the TOEFL test are limited vocabulary, concentration, and understanding of complex English structures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alhamdulillahirobbil'alamin. First of all, the researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to Allah SWT for the grace, opportunity, and health that has been given in completing this thesis. Blessings and greetings are also sent to the Prophet Muhammad SAW as an inspiration to continue enthusiastically in completing the thesis entitled "STUDENT'S BARRIERS IN TOEFL TEST A STUDY AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITAS PGRI SUMATERA BARAT".

Furthermore, the researcher would like to thank the supervisors, Rika Afriyanti, M.Pd, and Herfyna Asty, M.Pd, for the time, guidance, motivation, and valuable knowledge that have been provided during the thesis writing process, from the initial draft to the completion of the thesis. Furthermore, the researcher would like to express his deepest gratitude to the contributors, Armilia Riza, M.Pd, Siska, M.Pd, and M.Khairi Ikshan, M.Pd, for their contributions in completing this thesis. Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the lecturers in the English Literature Study Program for their support and patience in educating and guiding me since my first year at UPGRISBA.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my beloved mother and father, who have provided me with support and prayers at every opportunity, even with everything they have. And to my best friends, thank you for your motivation and encouragement. Finally, I hope this thesis is beneficial to its readers. I realize that this research report is far from perfect; therefore, I welcome any suggestions, criticisms, and input to improve this thesis.

REFERENCE

- Abboud, Z. A. R., & Hussein, N. J. (2011). The difficulties faced by advanced Iraqi foreign learners in passing ITP TOEFL test. *Journal of Basrah Researches (Humanities Series)*, 36(4), 111–141.
- Fitria, T. N., & Prastiwi, D. (2020). An analysis of students' difficulties in answering TOEFL test. *JETAL: Journal of English Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 2(1), 32–40.
- Hamouda, A. (2011). A study of listening comprehension problems in English encountered by Saudi students in the EL listening classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 2(2), 113–155.
- Mahmud, M. (2014). The EFL students' problems in answering the TOEFL test. *Jurnal Pendidikan Humaniora*, 2(2), 74–83.
- Phillips, D. (2001). *Longman complete course for the TOEFL test*. New York: Longman.
- Sulistyo, G. H. (2009). TOEFL in a Brief Historical Overview From PBT to iBT. *Bahasa Dan Seni*, August 2009, 116–127.