

Analysis of Student Perceptions on the Implementation of Required TOEFL Test before Graduation

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ABSTRACT

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is widely used as a graduation requirement for students at various levels. Malikussaleh University, Samudera University, and Gajah Putih University have implemented a mandatory TOEFL test with a certain minimum score before sitting for thesis defense. This study intended to examine student perceptions on the implementation of the mandatory TOEFL test as a graduation requirement at University. Four topics were raised in this study, namely a) Perspective on test requirements, b) test preparation, c) attitude during the test, and d) expectation of test results. This type of research is a qualitative research with a thematic analysis approach. The research data will be taken from a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with 30 students from 3 different universities regarding the implementation of required TOEFL test. The data is presented by mapping the themes from the results of the respondents' information. This study found that students agreed with the implementation of the mandatory TOEFL test as a graduation requirement. However, students varied in the cutting line scores. Some expected lower and some even higher. Generally, students had not given their best preparation for the test. Regardless their understanding on the importance of the test, many only prepared few days before the test day. While trying to perform optimally during the test, students could not escape from boredom and distraction during the test. Despite, they expected the best for the graduation requirements,

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1. INTRODUCTION

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is one of the English language test systems administered by many institutions and higher education (Nurhayati & Giri, 2014) to evaluate the level of English proficiency among students/students (Suminto, 2010). Specifically, this test measures students' abilities/ students in three aspects, listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension (Rahmalia, 2016). TOEFL scores are used in job application letters (Sugeng, Saleh, & G, 2012), promotion

People take the TOEFL test for many reasons. Some underwent tests to observe personal achievement and capacity, others took tests for functional reasoning. If calculated, there are at least

(Antoni, 2014) and daily conversation (Herwanda, Safriyono, & Haryono, 2012). As a consequence of instrumental motivation, such as a pragmatic approach to language learning, as well as test taking, TOEFL aiming to get a job or earn more money; utilitarian goals in an instrumentally motivated learner approach to language learning (Amiryousefi & Tavakoli, 2011). Thus, given the magnitude of its use and benefits, the majority of universities in Indonesia require their students to achieve a certain TOEFL score before graduation.

four main reasons why someone takes the TOEFL TOEFL test (Salma, 2018), namely 1) studying abroad, especially the teaching and learning process using English, 2) People who will become

employees of a government agency (CPNS/PNS), 3) Scholarship recipients, and 4) student graduation process. Given its functions and opportunities, it's no wonder the TOEFL test is becoming increasingly popular. However, the test requires the test taker to meet a certain score in order to be accepted. If we take a deeper look at the application, nowadays, various types of test formats have been developed and applied in universities to measure students' English proficiency.

To achieve targeted language proficiency and skills, many universities in Aceh, including Malikussaleh University, have policies regarding minimum TOEFL score requirements. The regulation requires final year students to achieve a score of 450 before attending a thesis trial or before being awarded a diploma. Students are required to take a test and are required to achieve a certain targeted score at the end.

The university conducts tests based on the 2015 Rector's Decree. The Chancellor requires all students to sit down and achieve a minimum score of 450 before the thesis trial. As regulated by the Chancellor, all students from 7 faculties in the university environment must comply with these regulations and take the exam. The Chancellor mandated all students to obtain a minimum TOEFL score of 450. This number was chosen based on the general acceptance of job applications in the market and has been commonly applied by many other universities in the country.

The university has set the TOEFL requirements for 5 years. However, after many years, no research has been done to understand the perspectives of students and lecturers on implementing this regulation on campus. Therefore, the researcher sees the need to conduct research to understand the perspectives of students and lecturers on the implementation of this policy on campus. This study looks at personal opinions and perspectives about the regulations, and their impact on students. Besides that, a broader study is needed and is not limited to just one university in order to get better and comprehensive results. For this reason, the researchers decided to take 3 samples of universities located in various locations as representatives of their respective regions in Aceh. In order to find out the perspectives and attitudes of

students towards the regulation of minimum TOEFL scores at universities, researchers will conduct studies at 3 universities, namely Malikussaleh, Lhokseumawe, Gajah Putih University, Central Aceh, and Samudera Langsa University.

1.1. History of TOEFL and Its Types

During the colonial period, before the nation became independent from the Netherlands, English was not yet popular in this country (Lauder, 2008). As quoted from Jenkins (2003), in terms of the use of English, Indonesia is included in the "Expansion Category" along with China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and many others. (Lauder, 2008). This means that English has not been widely used by the community. However, as the need has now grown rapidly, people are paying more attention to English than ever before. Thus, this has an impact on increasing public attention and improving language.

TOEFL was developed in 1963. It has been used by many countries and universities around the world (Nurhayati & Giri, 2014), and also Indonesia, as for applications for admission to colleges and universities abroad such as the United States. The TOEFL score has been used as a standard tool to test English proficiency. English as a foreign language (TOEFL) enjoys wide international use and acceptance as a measure of English language proficiency for education, work and other purposes (Snow, 1997). Test designed for test fairness to make testing free from bias and contribute to equality testing (Amiryousefi & Tavakoli, 2011). This is to ensure fair and objective test results for a reliable display of students' actual abilities.

There are three types of TOEFL questions, Paper-based TOEFL (PBT), Computer-based TOEFL (CBT), and Internet-based TOEFL (iBT). PBT is widely accepted for testing measurement, job applications, and general needs. TOEFL PBT consists of three parts; listening (listening (L), Structure and Written Expression (SW), and Reading Comprehension (reading comprehension (RC). In total, there are 150 questions to be answered within 2 hours. The maximum score is 677 and the score early early 217, so nothing lower than that. TOEFL.

There are many obstacles that test takers face when taking the TOEFL test. One person may face different obstacles than another, given the different nature of their language abilities. In her thesis, Salma (2018) outlines 10 big problems. Reviewing from the list, the author collected 4 main problems that test takers might face in the TOEFL Test.

- a) Lack of preparation results in a lack of vocabulary, familiarity with audio conversations, grammar,
- b) Psychological aspects, such as feelings of nervousness and fear, lead to an inability to think clearly and respond appropriately
- c) Time management that causes answering too fast or too slow.
- d) Lack of general insight and ability to determine answers based on the information provided.

In line with that, Amiryousefi & Tavakoli (2011) further detail this psychological aspect as exam anxiety caused by time limits, length of exams and lack of confidence. Test anxiety is believed to affect memory retrieval, increase the number of errors, and test results. However, some also believe that for some students some anxiety may be a good thing. This may motivate longer study periods and more careful attention to the questions on the exam.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Location

This research was conducted at three universities in three different regions of Aceh, namely Malikussaleh University in North Aceh, Samudera Universitas in Langsa, and Gajah Putih University in Central Aceh.

Malikussaleh University (Unimal) is located at Jl. Cot Tgk Nie Reuleut, Muara Batu, North Aceh, Aceh. Currently, the university has around 15,000 students studying in across the faculties and majors (Unimal, 2020). Samudera Universitas (UNSAM) Langsa is situated in Langsa City. The university is the third state university in Aceh Province. Now UNSAM has transformed and has

2,784 students spread across 5 faculties and 25 study programs. Gajah Putih University began in 1984 from Gajah Putih Foundation. Initially a Foundation, now Gajah Putih University has established into a University in Central Aceh region.

Data Collection and Analysis.

This type of research is quantitative research with a thematic analysis pattern. The data will be reviewed based on the themes collected from the results of interviews (FGD) with the respondents. This research was conducted at Malikussaleh University, Lhokseumawe, Samudera Gajah Putih University, Central Aceh and Samudera Langsa University. Participants in this study were 30 final year students who had or were about to take the TOEFL test as a requirement for their thesis defense. Students were selected randomly using a stratified-randomly sampling system. As this paper targets seniors, nearing graduation, those who need to get a certain TOEFL score to qualify to defend a thesis or, in the case of engineering faculty, to take up a diploma certificate.

2.2 Research Instruments and Procedures

The research questions were designed under four topics a) Perspective of test requirements, b) Test preparation, c) Attitude during the test, and d) Expectations of test results. The questions are about their perspective on applying the minimum TOEFL score as a requirement for thesis defense. Two questions were asked to further elaborate on the topic, so a total of eight (8) questions were formulated in the FGD. The findings are then evaluated and then elaborated based on the logical meaning constructed from the results of the discussion.

Sampling in this study was conducted using purposive sampling through an FGD with a representative of students from each university. A total of 30 students, 10 students from each campus, joined the FGD and discussion to discuss how they felt and thought about the implementation of TOEFL test regulation on campus. To collect the data of this study, the researcher conducted several focus group discussions (FGD) with randomly selected students from one of the universities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study will be described based on research questions; a) Perspective on test requirements, b) test preparation, c) attitude during the test, and d) expectation of test results.

Admitting the importance of English and needs for a test result certificate, students agree with the implementation of the mandatory TOEFL test. This come in no surprise as various job positions required TOEFL score certificate with certain required scores. Students also acknowledged various opportunities opened for those with good English language skills.

However, funding have been a common obstacle felt by students. Several students from Malikussaleh University and Gajah Putih University complained about the test fees they had to pay. Some of them said the registration fee was an obstacle due to financial matters. In addition to the test, some faced preparatory issues. Many students had no place/means to study. Taking the course will of course increase the preparation time and costs.

Malikussaleh University provides relief by not taking the first test fee. However, if they fail, the student will be charged a registration fee for the next test. This of course gives students the opportunity to take the test but is worried that they will be charged if they fail to get the planned score. However, this is felt very differently by Ocean University students who provide free test fees and test preparation fees. Samudera Langsa University provides freebies many times to students and provides free TOEFL test preparation training. This opportunity is widely opened so that students get the opportunity without being hit by worries about the cost of the test.

It is different with Gajah Putih University, this campus in Central Aceh charges fees for preparation and taking the TOEFL test. As a campus that has just implemented the mandatory TOEFL test, UGP still charges a test fee and does not provide incentives as at Malikussaleh University, let alone Ocean University.

The majority of students do not prepare to take the test ahead of time. Most of the students from the three campuses where this research is

located only prepare for about 1 week before the test, and even then it is not intensive. They study while following the lecture routine as usual. There is only 1 student, from Universitas Samudera, who prepares ahead of time and studies quite intensively. However, some only prepare themselves 2 to 3 days before the test.

The majority of student ts use online facilities and information in learning. They use Youtube, learning applications and online tests as well as materials obtained from google search. Some students also stated that they studied together before the test to discuss questions and strengthen each other.

Due to the availability of free learning facilities, Universitas Samudera students take advantage of the opportunity and study under the guidance of a tutor. This did not happen except for a few students at Malikussaleh University. Even though they have to pay, they are willing and able to study at the University Language Center under the guidance of an instructor who is also a lecturer on campus.

Students give relatively the same answers in answering this question. They said they were serious about taking the test, but it was undeniable that they often felt bored because it was difficult to focus for too long. They feel the pressure and obligation to pass the test in order to immediately follow the final trial. Many of them are worried that they will not pass the test, thus spurring them to be more serious in taking the test. However, they also don't deny the fact that sometimes the long test duration and the difficulty of answering questions make them lose focus and become daydreaming.

Students expect the best results after taking the test. They hope to get a score slightly above the limit so that it is suitable to be used as a trial requirement and used for administrative purposes applying for jobs. Some students are not so sure of their abilities and hope "as long as they get enough marks" when taking the test and don't expect much.

However, some students of Unsam's English study program dared to set high targets so that they could continue their studies abroad. Armed with better initial knowledge and preparation, some Unsam students want to continue their studies

abroad with scholarships, thus targeting a high TOEFL score. This value they need not only for now but can be used later for a greater purpose.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From this study, we can conclude that students agree and do not object to the application of the TOEFL test before graduation. They think that the TOEFL test is needed so it needs to be implemented. It's just me, financial and preparation factors are often obstacles so that some students find it difficult and not confident in taking the test.

The students' uncertainty in taking the TOEFL test is based on their lack of preparation to take the TOEFL test. Many students are unprepared or minimal preparation. This has an impact on the score they get on the test.

Researchers suggest students to better prepare themselves before taking the TOEFL test. Students should take the test based on preparation, not just profiting. Secondly, in taking the test must be addressed so that they have the right mind-set when taking the test. Researchers suggest to universities to facilitate and fund test and test preparation programs at least several times, not just once. This is to help students to be more prepared and confident about their graduation.

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